

After two years, I finally moved out of my dorm and rented my own apartment. It was listed as newly built, but it looked a little old. I wasn't complaining. It was the cheapest place anywhere nearby.

The weird part was the reviews. There were none. The apartment next door had dozens, but this one? Nothing. Maybe no one lived here before.

My friend dropped me off at the leasing office. The place was small and crowded, and a faint smell of burnt wood hung in the air. I sat on the only couch by the window, watching faint shadows of people moving along the walls until my name echoed in the room.

"Lara."

I grabbed my suitcase and walked toward the counter. The woman who called me smiled too wide, too fixed. My hair was in a messy bun, sweatpants clean, shirt fine. Why was she smiling like that? What did she expect me to wear? A suit like hers?

"Good morning, Ms. Lara," she said with a voice that felt rehearsed. "You are renting house 2386, right?"

"Yes." I smiled back. I was proud. This was my first time living completely alone.

She slid a thick envelope toward me. "Your rental agreement and keys are inside. Trash truck Tuesdays. Gym nine to ten. Pools close at dusk. Main gate locks at ten. Enjoy your stay, and keep your windows closed at night."

That last part was strange, but before I could ask why, she had already turned to help someone else. Inside my envelope was a smaller yellow one with no label. I shrugged and headed toward Building 13. Third floor. Of course.

The moment I stepped onto the first stair, a sharp cold wind slammed against my face. No open hallway. No breeze. Nothing that should have moved air. By the time I reached my door, my hands were trembling. The next apartment should have been occupied, but the hallway looked abandoned for a long time.

I tore open the yellow envelope. A single key and a folded note fell out.

"Follow the rules. You shall have a peaceful time."

I pushed the key into the lock, but before I turned it, the door swung open on its own.

The apartment smelled faintly of dust and overwatered flowers. A couch covered in white sat in the living room. Everything was clean and furnished, but cheap. Still, the air felt heavy, like the room had been holding its breath.

That first night, I tried unpacking, but something felt off. The walls were too smooth and too shiny, yet the corners curled slightly, almost like skin. I turned on the living room lamp. It clicked, hesitated, then flickered. The shadows on the walls rippled like something alive.

In the kitchen, my reflection in the window paused longer than it should have. I spun around. Nothing.
Silent. Too silent.

Then the scraping started. A slow deliberate drag from the bedroom. The floor was settling, I told myself. But the sound repeated. Rhythmic. like pacing.

I crawled into bed, trying to convince myself I was tired and overthinking. A new place. A new floor. New noises. Perfect excuses.

But sleep did not feel like sleep.

The dream was twisted. Rooms stretched far too long. Doors appeared where none existed. Shadows slithered on the floor and curled toward me.
I woke to the feeling of a cold hand brushing my wrist. I shot up. No one there. But a faint crescent mark sat on my skin.

The next morning I was startled awake, heart pounding and screaming. I rushed outside, walked around the building, breathed fresh air until I felt normal again. Maybe I was being dramatic. Maybe I was exhausted. Whatever it was, I convinced myself it was nothing and went back inside to clean.

Most people would have left the second they heard something that should not be heard. But something in me made me stay. It felt like I needed to.

I cleaned the living room, then the bedroom, then the small kitchen. I was almost done when I heard a knock. My stomach dropped.

It was the leasing office lady.

Her smile was the same. Too wide.
She held a bouquet of fresh flowers.

“These are for you, Ms. Lara. I hope you have a nice stay.”

As she walked away, I heard kids shouting and laughing outside. For a moment, I felt normal. Happy even. Real noise. Life. I closed the door, and the noise cut off instantly.
Like the apartment swallowed it. Like it preferred silence.

I walked to the flower vase I had not cleaned yet. Inside were dry withered flowers. The same species the woman had just handed me. My chest tightened. My heart pounded so loud I heard it in my ears.

Days passed. My fear grew, but something kept me from thinking about leaving. Something tugged at me with a soft insistence. Stay.

My dreams became vivid. I kept dreaming of this exact apartment. Same layout. Same corners. But there was a figure in the dreams. A figure shaped like me.

I could hear the walls breathing with me. It was faint but it matched the rise and fall of my chest. It felt like the apartment was syncing with me.

One evening I checked the mirrors. My reflection lagged for a split second. Then it caught up, but not smoothly. And then I saw her behind me in the glass. Pale. Still. Shaped like me.

I turned fast. *Nothing.*

Days blurred. Floorboards creaked behind me even when I stood still. Lamps tilted when I looked away. Corners seemed darker than they should. Texts would not be sent. Calls dropped. My phone battery drained twice as fast.

The apartment watched me.

I left the lights on in every room. Shadows moved slower that way, but they never stopped watching.

One night, I fell asleep from pure exhaustion. I woke to whispering right beside my ear.

“Lara.”

The shadows on the walls moved like liquid. Sweat ran down my neck. I needed to leave. Not the room. The entire building. I walked toward the hallway.

And froze.

Something stood in the bedroom doorway. It was me. But not exactly. Its posture was too perfect. Its eyes too bright. Too aware. Watching me like I was an imitation.

I stepped back. The floor shifted under my heel. My heart hammered so loud it drowned out my breathing. The other me didn't blink. Didn't breathe.

My voice cracked. “What do you want?”

It copied the shape of my mouth. My trembling lips. But no sound came out.

I stepped back again. It stepped forward. Fast. Clean. Too smooth. Like it had practiced wearing my skin.

The wallpaper behind me felt warm. Soft. Almost damp. Like it had been touched by too many hands over too many years. My arms shook. Numbness crawled up my legs like cold water sinking into fabric.

The other me raised its hand. My arm rose too. I didn't move it.

A whisper brushed the inside of my ear, close enough to feel breath that wasn't mine. "Let her out."

I tried to turn. Move. Anything. But my neck wouldn't budge. It was like my body only worked if the other me decided to move first.

The voice came again. From inside the wall. Not the room. Inside the wall. The wallpaper behind me pushed gently against my spine, like someone was pressing their face right on the other side, waiting for me.

The other me smiled. A tiny smile. My shy smile. The one I barely ever made.

"It is your turn," it whispered, though its lips didn't move.

The wall opened behind me. No sound. Just a slow parting, like a mouth that had been closed too long. Cold hands slid around my ribs and pulled.

My feet left the ground. I clawed at the wallpaper, but it melted under my nails. Too soft now. Too warm. Like overripe skin.

Tears blurred my sight as the cold dragged me backward. The last thing I saw before the wall closed over my face was the other me stepping into my place, adjusting my hair, lifting my phone, checking its reflection in the microwave like it wanted to make sure everything looked natural.

Then it opened the door. It walked into the hallway. And the door closed behind it.

I tried to scream inside the wall, but the sound dissolved. The dark swallowed it whole. Something shifted around me, tightening, settling me in like I was finally where I was supposed to be.

I sucked in a breath, trying to fight, trying to move. But nothing moved. Nothing listened. My screams turned to dust in my chest. Everything blurred into shadow.

The darkness folded over my eyes.

I tried to scream, but the wall kept my voice.

Then, through the plaster around me, I heard it.

My voice.

Clear. Almost singing.

And then it asked, almost curious:

“Ready for a company?”