

The house had always held its quirks- the draft that came from somewhere over the kitchen sink between the window and the wall that could never seem to be fixed, the seventh and tenth stairs right before the landing of the upper floor that screamed under foot as they were ascended and descended every day, and the distant smell of lavender that no one could figure out the source of. Every tenant that rented the house always made the same mistakes. They never listened to me when I told them the north wall in the dining room had shifted ever so slightly on its foundation, causing anything hung on it to be an inch off center. When I tried to stop them from making the mistake of turning on the furnace for the first time during the winter- an electrician had to be called beforehand because the system was a little wacky- they ignored me and did it anyway. Even when I tried to remind them to double check the doors and locks at night, they still had to just learn from their mistakes when they found raccoons in their cupboards the next day. Time and time again, tenants would attempt to fix up the place, but I liked it the way it was.

*Maybe that was why they always failed.*

I couldn't ever bring myself to be truly upset when they finally gave up and left. I enjoyed having the house to myself during the off seasons, and there were a lot of off seasons. Unfortunately for me, however, Halloween was always an 'on' season. I never understood the appeal of celebrating it, but the landlord had a tendency to market the house as 'haunted' during October to bring in some extra cash. It apparently took hold, and renters would travel from all different places simply to spend the month or even just a night in the so-called haunted house.

But, after that, came the winter months.

Life had a funny way of working during the winter months. Whenever I had housemates, they seemed to forget my existence completely as I holed myself away in my room. Winter depression hit me hard every year. But, every once in a while, I'd manage to get myself downstairs to sit and enjoy the company of the others. Being a constant, year round resident to the house, they never bothered me too much. There were boundaries set in the early days of their stay, and those who couldn't abide by them would leave while the others would find ways to work around them. It was the only reason I managed to get a room to myself instead of being forced to have a roommate.

I would admit, when there were families who moved in, I enjoyed the company of the little ones even with my introverted ways. I'd entertain them often so their parents could have the afternoon or evening off. I had barely become an adult myself, so I was able to relate fairly easily to the kiddos. I'd tell them stories of my own childhood, growing up in England, moving out west to where we were, and so on. But the most fun we had was when I could convince them to play hide and seek with me. They always told me I cheated, but I swore I never did. I simply knew the house better than anyone else did. There might have been a few times where I'd fibbed about cheating, but it had always been to simply make sure the children were safe. They were top priority for me, and I'd never let them come to any harm.

My protective instincts often led to restless nights. Not being a morning person, I tended to wander around the house at night, always feeling a bit uneasy. The dark set me a little on edge.

I could always feel justified by it, however, because it meant I could act as a sort of security guard for the property. We'd had a break in a few years back which I had met with fierce opposition. The would-be robber was sent running, tail tucked and screaming loud enough to wake the family that lived with me at the time.

No more trouble had come to the house since.

Maybe it was because the robber hadn't been able to see me in the dark. It could have been because he had begun to spread rumors about the house *actually* being haunted. Or it was quite possible that it was for a different reason entirely.

Honestly, I couldn't be sure. I couldn't leave the property after all with my body tethering me to the spot.