

The House that Waited - Draft 1

Slowly, the door creaked open, spilling sunlight into the darkened room. A rugged man stood in the doorway, a single bag slung over his shoulder, his black dog pressed close to his leg. His face was worn with deep-set lines, heavy eyebags carved from years of frowning, and a beard left untamed. He did not pause before entering.

The house was fully furnished, 1960s antique furniture standing as if it had never been abandoned. Old sofas with pictures of flowers embroidered on the seat sat stiff and untouched, thick brown wooden tables neatly aligned. Portraits lined the walls with their eyes that followed him as he moved. Beneath his boots, the wooden floorboards yawned and groaned of its age under his weight. He stepped out onto the veranda and surveyed the land. The grass was bright, green, trimmed with precision. A small pond lay still at the edge of the yard, its surface unbroken. Towering trees stood in silent fatigue, their branches unmoving, as they held their breath.

Leon didn't care. Not after where he'd come from.

Inside, Leon drifted through the living room. The furniture remained unchanged, preserved. On one wall, photographs stretched from one end to the other, evenly spaced, deliberate. The first showed two young parents standing proudly with a small child between them. In the second, the parents had aged, smiles thinner, the child gone. The third frame was empty. No photo. No dust. Just a blank, pale square where something had once been.

Leon looked at it for a moment, then turned away.

In the kitchen, knives lay scattered across the table, their steel catching the light. Papers littered the floor, blank, every one of them. The benches were spotless, the tiles polished so clean he could see his reflection staring back at him. The glare of sunlight pierced through the windows which illuminated the room without warming it. The dog whined softly and refused to step inside. Leon shut the door behind him.

That night, sleep came quickly but lightly. Leon was pulled awake by the sound of floorboards screeching, slow and deliberate. Furniture shifted somewhere in the house, wood scraping against wood. He sat upright, heart pounding, listening.

The noise stopped.

The dog growled at the bedroom door showing his full set of glowing, white sharp fangs. Leon stood and opened it. The hallway was empty before him. The air was cold. Yet something felt wrong. A chair that had been beside the wall earlier now sat closer to the centre. A portrait hung slightly crooked. When he returned to bed, the house felt closer, as if the walls concave further in. That night, he dreamed of rooms filled with people who never spoke, their faces familiar but unreadable.

One day, Leon wakes up with the sunlight piercing through the square window. As usual for his routine: 7:20am, shower, 7:30am, breakfast with two slices of bread and one sunny side egg with a tall glass of full cream milk by the dinner table. However, several bangs are heard through the walls. His eyebrows tilted. Quickly finishing his breakfast, he sees what has happened. He found documents in a drawer, deeds signed but never dated, letters half-written and never sent. Every page ended mid-sentence.

On his final morning, Leon stood at the door with his bag in hand. The dog pulled at the leash, desperate to leave. Behind him, the house was quiet. Patient. For a moment, Leon imagined unpacking. Sitting. Staying. Letting the rooms remember him so he wouldn't have to remember himself. He stepped outside instead. Weeks later, the house was listed again.

Fully furnished.

And in the living room, a new photograph hung neatly on the wall.