

The Hollow Man

It starts with the knocking.

At first, I thought it was coming from the apartment next door. The walls in this place are thin, and I've heard my neighbors before — arguments, crying, TV shows bleeding through the drywall, everything. But this knock...it's different. It's too precise, too intentional. Three sharp taps, always the same: tap-tap-tap.

I hear it every night, exactly at 2:13 AM. It wakes me from the same dream, the one where I'm standing in a dark room with someone just behind me, breathing against the back of my neck. I always turn, but no one's there. And then I wake to the sound of the knock.

At first, I ignored it. It's probably just the pipes, or some drunk tapping on doors in the wrong building. But the knocking keeps coming. Every night, the same three taps. Always at 2:13.

A week in, I bang on the wall, shouting for them to stop. No one responds. I call the building manager, but he says the apartment next to mine has been empty for months. He offers to come by and check for squatters, but something about that idea makes my skin crawl, so I tell him not to bother.

Instead, I decide to stay up one night, wait for the knocking to start, just to prove to myself it's nothing. I sit in the dark with my clock glowing red on the bedside table, rifle through old memories, reminding myself how to breathe.

The moment 2:13 hits, I hear it: tap-tap-tap.

It's coming from inside the wall.

I throw on the lights, heart hammering, and press my ear to the plaster. For a moment, there's only silence. Then I hear it, a faint scratching sound, like something small and sharp dragging across wood. I yank back, pulse racing, trying to convince myself it's just mice. But deep down, I know it isn't.

I try to tell myself that it's just my stress. I haven't been sleeping well. Work has been brutal lately, and the days bleed into each other until everything feels like one long, indistinct blur. Maybe it's in my head. Maybe I just need sleep.

But the knocking doesn't stop.

A few nights later, I'm standing in front of the wall with a hammer in my hand. I know how crazy this looks, I do. But it's 2:13 in the morning, and the knocking is louder than ever, a sharp tap-tap-tap, over and over, as if whatever's behind the wall knows I'm there.

I hit the plaster, shattering the wall in jagged bursts. I tear through insulation, splinters cutting my hands, until I create a hole big enough to see inside.

There's nothing. Just empty space and pipes. No rats, no wires, no explanation.

But as I stare into the darkness, I hear it, faint breathing, shallow and steady, coming from somewhere deeper inside the wall.

I step back, my whole body shaking. I seal the hole the next day, plastering it over as if that will make a difference. But I can't shake the feeling that something is still in there, watching me.

That's when other things start happening...

I misplace things, my phone, my keys, even food from the fridge. I'll set a glass down on the table and find it later on the bathroom sink. It's like someone is moving through the apartment behind my back, rearranging my life in ways so subtle it takes me hours to notice.

One morning, I wake to find the walls covered in faint, greasy handprints, like someone has been pressing their palms all over the surfaces while I slept. The prints are too small to be mine. I scrub them off, telling myself it's just my imagination.

But it's not.

I can't sleep anymore. Every night, I lie awake, listening to the breathing through the wall. I start seeing movement out of the corner of my eye, shapes flickering just outside my vision. When I turn to look, there's nothing there.

My friends say I'm paranoid. One of them sits me down and tells me I've been acting strange. "You're not yourself," they tell me, their voice gentle but firm. "Maybe you need to talk to someone."

I laugh it off, but something inside me twists. What if Amy is right? What if it's all in my head? I tell myself I'll get help. I even made an appointment. But I canceled it the day before.

Because what if it's not in my head? What if there's something in the wall?

I buy a camera and set it up in the living room, pointed toward the wall. If anything moves in the night, I'll have proof. I sit on the couch, watching the red light blink as the camera records.

That's when I notice.

The time on the camera reads 3 hours of footage, but I was only sitting there, looking at the wall, for an hour. I blink, confused. I could have sworn it was only midnight a moment ago. How did it get so late?

I rewind the footage, scrolling back through the hours I've lost. For a moment, everything looks normal. I see myself sitting on the couch, staring at the wall, disturbingly inert.

Then the lights flicker. Just for a second, but when they come back on, I'm gone.

The room is empty.

The camera keeps recording for another half hour. No movement, no sound, just the soft hum of the heater. And then, at 2:13 exactly, I appear again. I'm sitting on the couch like nothing happened, my face pale and slack, as if I've just woken from a dream.

I stare at the screen, heart pounding in my ears. Where did I go? How could I have just... vanished?

And then I notice something else.

The wall. The plaster where I made the hole. It's cracked again.

I haven't touched it since I sealed it up, but on the footage, I see it clearly: a jagged crack, running right through the center, as if something on the other side is trying to get out.

The knocking starts again that night. Louder this time. More frantic. I press my ear to the wall, and for the first time, I hear a voice.

It's my own.

It whispers, "Let me out."

And suddenly, the realization hits me.

I don't know which side of the wall I'm on.