

"The House That Followed"

By Vy Nguyen

It was supposed to be just for fun.

“Come on, Leo, it’s Halloween!” Mia said, tugging his sleeve. “One night at Blackwell Manor. We’ll get the photos, the adrenaline, and bragging rights.”

Leo forced a smile. He didn’t believe in ghosts—but the old mansion on Ridge Street was different. It wasn’t a staged haunted attraction. It was the real one—abandoned, cracked windows, police tape flapping like yellow tongues. The place where, rumor said, six people had vanished last October.

“Fine,” he said. “But we leave at midnight.”

They went with two others—Ben and Alina. Flashlights. Snacks. A portable speaker playing eerie music. Everything started as a joke.

Until they stepped inside.

The air was heavy, damp, like breathing through wet cloth. The hallway stretched too long, the shadows too deep. The wallpaper peeled in the shape of faces.

Ben laughed nervously. “Creepy. Perfect TikTok spot.”

“Guys,” Alina whispered. “Did you hear that?”

Something creaked upstairs. Slow, deliberate footsteps.

“Probably the house is settling,” Leo said, but his throat was dry.

They explored anyway—room by room. A nursery with a broken rocking horse that still swayed. A mirror with cracks running like veins. A portrait of a woman whose eyes seemed to follow them.

When midnight came, they left—laughing too loud, pretending they weren’t scared.

But that night, Leo dreamed.

He was back in the house. Alone. The hall was longer now, the air colder. He could hear someone whispering his name from the nursery.

Leo... come play with us.

He turned, flashlight flickering. A small handprint appeared on the mirror. Then another. Then dozens.

He ran—but the front door was gone. The walls pulsed like a heartbeat. The whisper grew into a wail.

You left us here.

Leo woke up screaming, heart pounding. His clock read 3:17 a.m.

“Just a dream,” he muttered. But when he turned on the light, his shoes—muddy from the house—were by the bed. He was sure he’d left them outside.

The next morning, he texted Mia:

Did you guys dream about it too?

She replied almost instantly:

Yes. Same house. Same time.

Ben texted next: Dude, I heard knocking on my window last night.

Alina didn’t reply.

That evening, Leo tried to shake it off. He watched a movie, ate dinner, scrolled on his phone. But when he closed his eyes, he was back.

Same dream. Same house. But this time, the others were there too—Mia, Ben, Alina—all pale, wide-eyed, trapped in the hallway.

“What’s happening?” Mia screamed.

“The dream—it’s pulling us back!” Ben yelled.

The floor cracked open, and dark water spilled out. From the water rose the woman from the portrait—eyes black, mouth wide as a scream.

“You shouldn’t have come back,” she said. “Now you’ll stay.”

They ran for the door—but it was no longer wood. It was a mirror, and their reflections were smiling when they weren’t.

Leo slammed into it—and the reflection grabbed his wrist. Cold. Solid.

He gasped and woke up again.

Morning light. Safe. His room.

Except—his wrist still had a red handprint.

Panicking, he called Mia. No answer. Ben—no answer. Alina—voicemail.

He drove to Mia’s house. Her mother was crying on the porch.

“She didn’t wake up,” she sobbed. “She just... she won’t wake up.”

Leo’s blood turned to ice. He drove to Ben’s—same thing. Alina’s—same thing.

All three, alive but unconscious. Doctors said they were “in deep sleep,” unexplainable.

That night, Leo stayed awake, terrified to dream. But exhaustion won.

He opened his eyes—and there it was. The house. Waiting.

The others stood by the staircase, motionless, their faces blank.

“Please,” Leo whispered. “Let us go.”

The woman appeared again. Her smile stretched unnaturally. “You already left once. It’s rude not to say goodbye.”

He ran up the stairs, toward a door glowing faintly. He flung it open—and found his own bedroom on the other side. His sleeping body was in the bed.

He stepped closer. “I can wake up,” he whispered.

The woman’s voice echoed from behind him: “Can you?”

Leo reached for his body—and his reflection in the window smiled, even though he wasn’t.

He screamed—

—and woke up gasping.

Daylight. Real this time. The sound of birds. Relief flooded him. He was home.

He grabbed his phone. Messages flooded in.

They woke up! Mia wrote. Ben too! Alina’s fine!

Leo laughed shakily. “It’s over,” he whispered.

He went to the bathroom to wash his face. The mirror was foggy. He wiped it—and froze.

His reflection didn’t move.

It just smiled.

And in the faint reflection behind him, the wallpaper had changed—dark, peeling, familiar.

He turned slowly.

The room wasn’t his bedroom anymore.

It was the hallway of Blackwell Manor.

And this time, the door behind him was gone.

Some doors, once opened—even for fun—can never truly close. Curiosity and disbelief can invite things that never leave.

