

NIGHTMARE'S EMBRACE



The Lens of Whispering Shadows

Moses Chibuike

BY ELEANOR VANCE



Elara discovered a heavy, brass-bound camera tucked away in the deepest corner of her grandmother's attic. The air smelled of ozone and ancient dust as she wiped the lens, feeling an inexplicable chill. Without thinking, she pressed the shutter, and the machine groaned to life with a mechanical wheeze.



The first photo developed slowly, revealing Elara standing in the attic, but a smudge of darkness clung to the edge of the frame. It looked like a tall, distorted shadow leaning against the rafters. She looked around the empty room, but there was nothing there except the dancing dust motes.



Back in her bedroom, Elara took another photo to test the flash. When the image cleared, the shadow had moved from the edge to the center of the doorway. It now had long, spindly fingers that seemed to be gripping the wooden frame, though the actual door remained perfectly still.



Panicked, Elara threw the camera into the kitchen trash can and covered it with scraps. An hour later, she walked into her bedroom to find the camera sitting perfectly upright on her pillow. A fresh, damp photo was already sticking out of the slot, showing the shadow standing at the foot of her bed.



She fled into the hallway, her heart hammering against her ribs like a trapped bird. She snapped a photo toward the stairs, hoping to see nothing but the carpeted steps. Instead, the photo showed the entity halfway up the flight, its featureless face tilted upward as if sniffing the air for her scent.



Elara locked herself in the bathroom, the only room with a heavy bolt. As she leaned against the door, a soft clicking sound echoed from the other side. A single photograph slid slowly under the door crack, showing the bathroom interior from a high angle, as if someone were watching her from the ceiling.



THE HAUNTING
- A Chapter Illustration -

She looked up at the ceiling, but it was smooth and white. She took a desperate photo of the vanity mirror, hoping the flash would blind whatever was hunting her. The reflection in the photo showed her screaming, while a pair of pale, elongated hands reached out from the mirror's surface to grab her shoulders.



The air in the room turned freezing, and the smell of wet earth filled her lungs. She realized the camera wasn't just capturing spirits; it was pulling them into her reality with every click. The camera began to take photos on its own, the shutter firing rapidly like a frantic heartbeat.



Each new photo showed the shadow entity closer than the last, its distorted face now inches away from the lens. Elara felt a cold pressure on the back of her neck, though she was still alone in the locked room. She looked down at the final photo emerging from the camera, her hands trembling so hard she could barely hold it.



The final image was perfectly clear, showing an empty bathroom with the camera lying broken on the floor. Elara was nowhere to be seen in the photograph or the room. The only thing left was the faint sound of a mechanical shutter clicking one last time in the silence.