**Being at Home** July 6, 2022

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“This house is haunted,” Eileen shouts, storming into the room. I half expect the fine china to rattle and portraits to fall off the walls with the force of her anger, but I suppose that would just prove her point.

Mark sets down his sandwich with a sigh, unable to take even one bite in peace. “Not this again.”

“I’ll keep telling you until you listen!”

I roll my eyes and leave the room; they never listen to me when they’re like this, anyway. Instead, I take a long hot bath, enjoying the cantankerous thrum of the old pipes. I gleefully pour in some of Eileen’s bubble bath and improvise a silly song about rabbits and rubber ducks as I splash about. But even when I’m done, they’re still going at it.

Frankly, I’m starting to worry. Their relationship has always been so strong, but now Eileen is getting paranoid about tiny things that just don’t bother Mark and me. It’s an old Victorian house, still with its original wallpaper and creaky floorboards, and I really enjoy living here. It’s a little ragged, sure, but the bones of it are just so good: not many people get to live in historical buildings, after all. But, being old, admittedly there are some strange sounds that come out of it, and Eileen doesn’t like that.

“It’s just the house settling,” I’ve told her a hundred times, but still she insists that something foul is afoot.

Back downstairs, silence is cooling, and so is the lumpy stew that’s meant to be dinner.

“I’m not hungry,” I mutter, and I stomp outside. I pass the time on my favorite swing, threading twisted daisies into delicate flower chains. But when the light fades, and I can’t see my hands anymore, I have no choice but to creep back inside. Eileen has been burning her exotic incense again, to bring “good karma” she always says, but it doesn’t seem to be working—all it does is make me dizzy with its pungency. They must both be in bed now. I call out goodnight along the hallway, but there’s no answer.

The next morning, Mark looks older, more grizzled.

“Fine,” he says, his tone as black as his coffee. “You get your way. We’ll move.”

Eileen is immediately appeased, coyly kissing his cheek and thanking him, but I just feel sick.

I run through the house, not caring as I slam the doors behind me. I don’t stop until I’m back outside by my swing, bawling my eyes out.

I thought this time was different—I thought we’d spend more time together. But these roommates are moving on, just like the others.

This last century has been so lonely.