

Excerpt from “On Location” - Rachel’s story

She headed for the stairs.

On the third floor landing, she paused to listen to the noise through the walls. Her knock was answered by a woman in paint-splattered overalls and a haze of salsa music.

“Hi,” Rachel said. “Sorry to bother you, but I’m thinking of moving in downstairs, and I’m just trying to get a sense of the building. You know how landlords never really tell you *everything*.” She added just the right amount of exasperation.

The woman laughed. “Smart idea.”

“Oh? Something I should know?”

“No, no,” the other said. “Murray’s pretty good about getting something fixed if it goes wrong, mowing lawns, clearing the driveway, that sort of thing. At least he’s nearby. And the rent is amazing for this area.”

“Yeah, I noticed.”

“When we first came, we considered that apartment downstairs first, but then the guy who was living in this one moved out suddenly, and I wanted the extra light for my work.” She gestured vaguely at her colour-smearred clothes. “It’d be great if you moved in – we haven’t been comfortable with it being empty for so long. It’s like inviting a break-in or something, you know?”

“Has that been a problem around here?”

“No, no – I don’t want to give you the wrong idea. It’s just kind of a strange history. A nice young couple were the most recent ones in there, but they weren’t even here half a year. Before them it was some guy, I think he was a mechanic, but he moved out after a few months, too. Before that... oh yes, Mr. Franklin took it when we took this place.” She lowered her voice. “You’ll probably meet him on moving day, if you take the apartment. He’s on the ground floor now, only lasted a few months downstairs. I’m not sure why, though – he’s not much for conversation.”

Rachel resisted the urge to claim Mr. Franklin as an old familiar friend.

The woman in the doorway shrugged. “We’re just starting to wonder why no one stays. We aren’t that loud, I promise.”

“I believe you.” Rachel made a show of looking around. “And there’s nothing wrong with the building itself?”

“No. We love it. Great location, nice and quiet, close to everything...”

“Maybe that apartment’s just cursed,” Rachel said lightly, then watched the woman pick at the paint around her knuckles. “Is it cursed?”

“No, of course not.”

Rachel raised her eyebrows.

Flecks of dried cobalt blue drifted to the floor. “It’s just... something that couple said. But it’s silly. I’m sure it’s nothing.”

“I don’t mind silly. What did they say?”

The woman sighed. “They said they kept hearing things. And misplacing stuff – as in, it wasn’t where they’d left it when they needed it later. They said it felt... I don’t know, haunted or something.” She laughed uncertainly.

“Ah.”

“They were nice,” the woman added. “But a little strange. In a good way, but still... strange.”

“Well, fortunately, *I* am completely normal.” Rachel gave the woman the sunny smile that had failed to work with Mr. Franklin, and stuck out her hand. “I’m Rachel, by the way. And I do believe I’m going to be your downstairs neighbour.”