

(Known supernatural hunter and investigator is called in to look into disturbances at a semi-isolated apartment complex in the warehouse district of a local city. That 'disturbance' is an Earth-bound Kay.)

It was an average fuckin' Tuesday, I was editin' the highlights of one of my research streams for YouTube and expectin' a slow fuckin' day after that. All the leads I was followin' were on hold until some of my sources could get back t' me with more information, but that didn't mean I couldn't doom scroll through my socials for anythin' that caught my eye. Mortals were fuckin' idiots, but sometimes they stumbled into some juicy shit. Some of my favorite cases came from doom scrollin' through social media.

I was about to call it quits; I was gettin' hungry and my favorite asian place down the way would be closin' in a few hours. I was cravin' some veggie lo mein and I was gonna ride that fuckin' wave.

That's when I saw it. It looked like a shit post, but I it showed some promise:





I opened the link in a separate tab, then left to go pick up my lo mein, knowin' it would still be waitin' for me when I got back.

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When I got back with my food, I grabbed the laptop and moved to my couch, popping up a playlist of nostalgia Tik-Toks on the TV and balancing the foam carton on one of my knees. I forked a few bites of noodles into my mouth, 'cause damn were they good noodles, and tried to remember if I still had any pogs stashed anywhere...

I managed to get my focus back on track and pulled up the article I'd set aside earlier.

"Police were dispatched to the scene of an alleged domestic violence incident on the evening of May 22nd after receiving a call from the alleged suspect.

When later questioned by police, the suspect stated that her upstairs neighbor had passed her in the hall earlier that day and 'a cold sweat had washed over her'. Later in the day, while arguing with her husband, the caller became violent and struck her husband with a blunt-force instrument. After the assault, the caller then went down to the on-site landlord's apartment to call an ambulance for her husband. The caller stated: 'My husband doesn't need the police, because my neighbor used telepathy to force me into attacking my husband. Please send an ambulance as soon as you can.'

Police took the suspect in question into custody after speaking with the victim of the attack in his hospital room later that night.

The victim declined to comment when contacted by the media.

Multiple of the victim's neighbors were later interviewed by police and explained that the suspect had become more and more aggressive throughout the week towards one of the neighbors in particular, a newer tenant that requested to remain anonymous, that had moved into the building a few weeks before. The neighbor, when questioned, stated that the suspect had even

attempted to shove them down a flight of stairs a few days earlier, a statement that was corroborated by the other tenants, but was under the impression that the suspect was under the influence and planned to contact authorities should it happen again.

'I'm a registered nurse and I have to deal with this kind of thing a lot. I also know that people just aren't themselves when they're under the influence and I talked to her about it later and she apologized. I thought everything was fine. I'm just sorry I didn't contact the authorities when it happened. She obviously needs help and I honestly didn't think she'd be a danger to anyone else. She seemed to like all of the other neighbors and I figured she'd just been having a rough patch. .I'm just glad that she's going to be able to get the help she needs now,' the new tenant stated, 'I just feel awful about the whole thing and I'm glad he [the victim] is going to be ok.'

Shit, this lady is wacka-doo..."

There was somethin' about it, though. Somethin' I couldn't quite put my finger on.

I checked back through the comments of the original post and found a link to another police report from earlier in the year and found the clue I was lookin' for. Another of the tenants from the same apartment went missin' back in January. None of the neighbors knew what happened to him, only that the tenant and all of his belongings had disappeared one day. The landlord didn't even know when the man had left, because she'd never been told he was planning to leave and only found out when she went to collect the late rent.

I found the address for the apartment building and did a quick search for articles in the surrounding area. It wasn't a particularly shady part of town, but it wasn't entirely out of the norm for petty and domestic crimes, either. It just looked like an average suburban town, really. Every family had a black sheep and sometimes they stirred up some shit. Addicts, shop-lifters, unruly teenagers and gang violence were all pretty common in places like that, almost especially small towns and cities. There was just somethin' about not havin' a mall within a ten minute drive that made people go nuts.

Well, at least they had a Kroger's...

But, it was strange that there had been so many incidents in the one place, back t' back like that, and before this year, there hadn't been any issues. It also looked like there hadn't been any incidents since those either. I mean, it'd only been a couple of weeks since the incident happened, but it seemed like it should escalate more.

Maybe the tenants were just trying to keep their heads down, now...

I saved the articles in my 'Case?' folder, set up some alerts for the location, then shut everything down for the night. I was startin' to get tired and the screen was givin' me a headache. I cleaned up the last of my dinner and headed for bed.

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A little over a week later, I got a ping on my phone from one of my tag alerts; the missing tenant from that apartment building had just been found. *Dead*.

I waited a few more weeks to let the press and police activity die down a bit, but I *had to know* what was goin' on with the place. There were lots of things I considered and ruled out, plenty of supes that could make people violent, but most of them didn't fit with what I'd learned about the area.

It was the combination of the crimes, though. The woman had said she'd felt something cold wash over her before she got her violent urges. That matched up with a lot of different ghosts and spirits, but so few of them were actually dangerous or aggressive. Poltergeists didn't seem likely, 'cause there hadn't been any reports about the place itself, just the people in it. Vengeful and violent spirits, however, could very well have been in the cards.

The only other conclusion I could come up with at that point was maybe something more tangible than that. It could very well have been just humans being shitty to each other. It was even the most likely answer.

Nothing I came up with really felt *right*, though...

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Curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought it back.

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I packed up some of my equipment, bought a bus ticket up to the town in question, and got myself a cheap hotel. Once I'd settled in I went out on the town to do a little bit of local sleuthing (and maybe to this fuckin' fantastic dance club that played 90's pop and hip hop I'd read about in the town's tourism directory. *Fuck* that one guy had a body like a greek statue and his number was now in my phone. I hadn't decided what I was gonna do with that yet, **but** it was there. Just in casies...).

The community around the place was pretty standard stuff, lower-middle class and lots of warehouses near the water, just barely big enough to be classified as a 'city'. Bored teenagers and young adults lurked in public spaces, people walked their dogs, old boomers yelled about 'kids these days'. Same ol', same ol'.

It seemed like there was nothing to find. No history of hauntings or local urban legends. The place didn't even have any cryptid activity. It was *bonkers*.

It was almost *too* normal.

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I'd considered calling the apartment building ahead to see if I could get in contact with the landlord or the tenant from the interview, but decided at the last minute that I preferred the element of surprise. I was sure they were probably tired of being harassed by reporters and police at this point, and was hoping I could find a way to slip under the radar.

I was glad I'd decided to go with my gut when my Uber driver turned onto the block the apartment building was on. It wasn't a *scent* so much as a *feeling* and that feeling was *hauntingly* familiar. The hair at the back of my neck stood on end and I broke out into a cold sweat. I only just managed to keep myself from pretending like I'd gotten the address wrong just to get away from the place, but I'd already come all this way.

I always knew curiosity would fuckin' kill me one day...

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She answered after the first knock, looking put out and frustrated, her hair a tumble of ashy brown waves that fell into her face when she flung the door open. She shoved the locks out of the way with a huff and narrowed her eyes at me.

"I thought I told you fuckers to-! *Oh*. You're a new one, awesome, maybe you'll take a hint," the woman commented, crossing her arms under her ample chest and pouting up at me. She was looking at me suspiciously, but with slightly less fire in her eyes than she'd opened the door with, "Look, if you're a reporter, I really don't wanna answer anymore questions. There's nothin' left to tell and I really don't wanna get *another* restraining order. I fucking hate filling out those stupid forms, I'm pretty sure I have carpal tunnel, and I just want to be left the fuck alone."

I could only stand in the doorway, probably lookin' like a fuckin' moron and almost pissing my pants.

The neighbor from the interview *was* a demon. I could *feel* it, I could *smell* it, and, for just a second, I could *see* it! Her eyes had gone all dark and spooky and fire and brimstone and I was ready to run fuckin' screamin'.

Just as I was tryin' to convince my legs to start working again, though, her face softened and her brows furrowed.

"*Oh*," she said again, this time almost a whisper as she looked me over, head to toe, then back up to my face, "You're *not* one of them..."

It seemed so absurd. I had my backpack full of equipment and my camera tucked under my arm. There was no way that she should have expected that I *wasn't* a reporter, except...

Except that she was the thing! The thing I'd been tryin' to figure out! And she was a fuckin' *demon*!

"You needa sit down, darlin'," she asked, tilting her head to the side and batting her big, pretty eyes at me, "You look like you're about to keel over."

"I-I," was about all I managed before a door down the hall opened and an older gentleman stepped out.

"This guy botherin' you, hon," the older guy asked in the thickest southern drawl I'd ever heard, his eyes narrowed at me.

"Nah, Joe," she waved it off and smiled sweetly, her eyes suddenly looking tired, "Just an anxious *friend*." Her smile turned wry and the old man nodded.

"You just be careful, Kay. Crazy people out here these days," he murmured, hesitating, "Never know who you're gonna get when you mess with that internet."

"I will. Thanks for lookin' out, bud," Kay sighed, stepping back into her doorway so he wouldn't see her rolling her eyes, "You take care, too."

"Eeyup," the old man waved a hand even though she couldn't see it and shuffled back into his own apartment.

I blinked dumbly between the two, noting that not a hint of glamour or influence passed between them; it was just one neighbor checkin' on another one. I frowned.

"You may as well come on in, Joe's seen you now," Kay muttered as she turned into her apartment and waved for me to follow, "Shut the door, please?"

Still nothing. No influence or compulsion in her voice, just a woman that'd had it with other people's bullshit.

I did as she asked and looked around, checkin' for anything weird or obvious.

But it was just an apartment.

On the smallish side, but she probably paid too much for it, cozy and full of knick-knacks, lots of comfy places to sit and plenty of books haphazardly stacked around. The kitchenette looked like it doubled as her work space, a laptop and piles of manila folders and official looking forms littered all over a little wrought iron cafe-style table, topped with a polished wooden board instead of glass or being bare.

She looked like she was ready to take a nap, instead of being dressed at three in the afternoon, her oversized sweater slipping off one shoulder and covering her almost to the knees. I caught a peek of shorts, not that I was looking, and her feet were covered in some fuzzy socks with cute little...

Were those Animal Crossing characters?

My gaze finally rose back to her face and I blinked at her like I'd only just seen her.

"Sorry, that's something I can't fix," she mumbled, looking slightly guilty, "I'd turn it off if I could."

"Huh?"

"You keep looking at me," she explained, leaning against the counter of her kitchenette and hugging herself like she was cold. She probably was, even though it was hot this high up, "I can't turn that part off, but you should still have all your own thoughts and stuff."

I could feel my brows furrowing together, confusion makin' me antsy, "What the fuck are you talking about?"

She started to look just as confused as I felt, frowning and dropping her eyes to the ground, staring like it would give her answers, "You smell a little like me, but not quite..." Her nose twitched like she needed to sneeze, but she blinked rapidly and the expression faded, "Wood smoke, but... new? I'd say imp or something, but its too fresh for that. Too *green*."

Ah. She could tell I wasn't human either, apparently. I shrugged and tried to figure out what to say to that.

"You can set your stuff down and have a seat, if you want? I won't come any closer to you unless you ask me to," she explained, sliding from the counter down into her little rolling chair, "I don't do that kind of thing."

I reluctantly slipped my backpack off my shoulder and perched on the arm of the couch closest to me, "What kind of thing?"

"Non-con? I mean, I'll play at con-non-con, but we'd have to talk it out first," she was babbling a little bit, then stopped and took a deep breath, let it out slowly through her nose, "Sorry. That's... I shouldn't assume things, my therapist keeps saying that." She dropped her head into her hands and rubbed roughly at her face.

I could see the dark circles under her eyes once she lifted her head again. She looked like she'd been up all night, maybe wasn't eatin' great.

"Who are you, then," she asked, tryin' ta look more put together than she was and not doin' as

well as she probably hoped she was, “I didn’t ask and I don’t remember you sayin’.”

“Ummm, Pix. You can call me Pix,” I said, fiddling with the strap on my camera bag and trying to suss her out.

“Alright, then. You had to come here for somethin’. If it ain’t sex and you ain’t a reporter, then I can’t guess why you even have a camera bag-...” She stopped mid-sentence and glanced at her phone as it buzzed. She picked it up and shot off a quick text, then smiled faintly, “Sorry, work.”

“No problem,” I assured, squirming a little bit, “I’m not gonna lie. I straight up thought you were gonna set me on fire when you opened the door and I’m still recovering from that?” I could feel the sweat building on my brow and under my arms again, my hands starting to shake now that some of the adrenaline had worn down.

“Take your time, bud,” she chuckled, looking a little startled at the confession, “I intimidate a lot of people, apparently.”

“I don’t think its *you*,” I clarified, wringing my hands nervously, “Its more... what you are? Shit, that sounds racist as hell, huh? But you ain’t human, that much is clear now, and I’ve had some bad run ins with...” I didn’t wanna say ‘people like you’, ‘cause that was fucked up, even if it was true.

“I get what you mean,” she sighed, “I don’t get along with people like me much either. Buncha assholes, majority of ‘em.”

“Yeah,” I chuckled and slipped off the arm of the couch and into the seat, twisting so I fell onto my back with my feet propped up on the arm, “No offense, but yeah.”

“None taken,” she assured, finally leaning back in her chair and relaxin’ a little, though she started fiddling with the cuff of her sweater. Then she asked, “You want a drink or somethin’? I was thinkin’ about makin’ myself coffee, but I’ve got tea and water and stuff.”

“No coffee, but anything with caffeine, please.”

“I think I might have a coke or something left over from movie night,” she mumbled to herself as she pushed herself to her feet and meandered to her fridge. I could hear her rummaging around for a bit, then the tell-tale clunk of an aluminum can on the counter top, “Last one, all yours, bud.”

“Oh, I don’t wanna take your sodas,” I offered.

“Nah, I don’t really drink ‘em. Friends leave ‘em over sometimes, though,” she shrugged and shuffled around her little kitchen, “You mind if I have coffee? Or does the smell bug you?”

"Nah, just too bitter for me."

"Me, too, really," she admitted and grabbed a kettle from the dish rack beside her sink. She filled it and set it up on the stove, flicking the knobs to turn on the burner, "Tea it is, my dude. You want a glass or anything? Ice?"

"Nah, I'll drink it out of the can."

"Cool," she mumbled, then walked over to me, arm out with a Coca-cola in her hand.

"Thanks," I took it gingerly and popped the tab, making sure it wasn't going to overflow before I took a slurp, "Hell yeah, that's the spot."

She snorted and flopped back into her chair, rolling a few inches away before she awkwardly scooted back up to the table. She perched her feet on the wheel bar and rocked side to side a bit, "So...?"

"Oh yeah! Ok, so," I sat up again, propped on my elbows and tipping my head awkwardly to address her, "So, I was following the case..."

She sat up straight and frowned, "So you are a reporter?"

"Nah, I hunt supes..."

"-...hunt?"

This time she nearly whispered, her eyes going wide.

"Nah, not like," I dragged my finger across my neck, then flipped to sit up properly, leaning forward on the cushion, "Like... I hunt ghosts and stuff?"

She blinked slowly at that, then leaned back in her seat again, "Huh..."

"I mean, yeah, I guess? Its totally a thing, though, like, that stuff is super real."

She looked at me closer and gave me a frazzled look, "Well, yeah..." She motioned between us, "*We are that stuff...*"

"I mean, yeah, but not everybody knows that, right? I mostly go and debunk stuff," I explained, really getting into it now, "Those fake ghost hunter shows make me fuckin' nuts and I just hate that shit. I go and check out 'hot spots' and shit and sometimes stay at 'haunted' hotels."

"You ever *actually* find any ghosts?"

I halted my babbling and looked at her skeptically, "Well... *yeah*."

"Why the fuck...? You know what, you do you, boo," she chuckled incredulously, holding her stomach and reluctantly slipping out of her chair when the kettle started to whistle. She shuffled around her kitchen some more and made herself a cup of tea with an actually obscene amount of honey, then plopped back in her chair, "Do you do it to, like, to *fuck with people*? Or what?"

"Sometimes? Are you kiddin' me? Its fuckin' hilarious," I crowed, hopping up into a crouch, "You should see all the fuckin' comments I get. People *rage*, dude."

Kay shook her head and took a sip of her tea, wincing slightly, but taking another immediately.

"You," she said finally, "Are a sad, strange little man."

"Did you just fuckin' quote Toy Story at me?"

"You bet your sweet ass I did."

I just laughed. I had a feelin' we were gonna get along *just fine*.

