

Entry One: It Begins (733 words)

Dear Journal,

Let me jst start by saying: I WAS NOT TRYING TO SACRIFICE THE GUINEA PIG.

I know how it looked. Me. Butter knife in one hand. Guinea pig in the other. Salt circle on the floor. Room dimly lit like I was preparing to summon the ghost of Edgar Allan Poe via rodent. But I swear, my intentions were pure.

Mostly.

Flashback to five minutes earlier:

Cheetos (my Guinea pig, not the snack) had just coughed. Not like a normal guinea pig cough (which I've never heard, but I assume sounds like a hiccup wearing socks). No, this one was in Latin.

In Latin!

Do you know how alarming it is to hear "Veni ad me, puer" come from something that poops in wood shavings?

I dropped my string cheese.

That was Mom's thing—after school, every day. Same cheese. Same time. Still peeled the same way. Still expected her to say something dumb and perfect. Habit, maybe. Ritual, definitely. Like I'm pretending nothing's changed.

I dropped it.

Naturally, I did what any reasonable person would do in a paranormal crisis: I fetched my emergency exorcism kit. (Standard shoe box, labeled MIKE'S STUFF—DO NOT OPEN), top of closet next to my old detective kit:

\*salt

\* silver necklace I once won in a fair (well, fake, but demons don't know the difference)

\* and a laminated checklist or prayers from Catholic school

I haven't updated it since... well, since, you know.