Once Upon A Letter...

Dear New Owner,

Congratulations.

If you are reading this, then the house is yours.

I imagine you are standing in the hallway right now, surrounded by boxes, wondering why the previous owner left a letter instead of simply saying goodbye.

There are three things you need to know.

First: never open the locked cupboard beneath the stairs.

Second: never answer the front door after midnight.

Third: whatever you do, never move the mirror in the upstairs hallway.

I know how ridiculous that sounds.

I laughed when the previous owner told me the same things.

I thought she was trying to scare me.

She wasn't.

The first night, I heard knocking from inside the cupboard.

Three slow knocks.

Then silence.

The second night, it happened again.

Three knocks.

I told myself it was pipes. Old houses make strange noises.

On the third night, I opened the cupboard.

There was nothing inside.

No boxes. No pipes. Nothing except a dusty envelope lying on the floor.

It had my name on it.

Inside was a single sentence:

You shouldn't have opened it.

That was when I decided to leave.

At exactly midnight, the doorbell rang.

I froze.

Nobody should have been there.

It rang again.

Then came a voice.

"Please let me in."

It sounded like my mother.

My mother had been dead for six years.

I didn't answer.

The voice changed.

This time, it was mine.

"Please let me in."

I ran upstairs.

That's when I saw the mirror.

I'd walked past it hundreds of times, but that night something was wrong.

There was a person standing in the reflection behind me.

I spun around.

Nobody was there.

When I looked back, the reflection was gone.

I remembered the third rule.

And, like an idiot, I moved the mirror.

Behind it was a narrow space in the wall.

Inside were hundreds of envelopes.

Some were yellow with age. Some looked brand new.

Every single one was addressed:

Dear New Owner.

I opened one.

It contained the same three rules.

I opened another.

The same.

Another.

The same.

Then I noticed the dates.

They stretched back more than a hundred years.

I found one dated 1894.

Another from 1927.

Another from 1963.

Then I found one dated last year.

It was signed by the woman who sold me the house.

At the bottom she had written:

I tried to leave. It wouldn't let me.

My hands were shaking when I found an envelope with my name on it.

I opened it.

Inside was a letter written in my handwriting.

I hadn't written it.

Not yet.

It described everything I had done that night.

The cupboard.

The door.

The mirror.

Everything.

Then I read the final paragraph.

"When you finish reading this, you will sit at the desk downstairs. You will write a letter to the next owner. You will warn them about the three rules. You will think you're helping them."

I dropped the letter.

The front door slammed shut.

I tried the handle.

Locked.

The lights went out.

From beneath the stairs came three slow knocks.

I understood then.

VP

The letters weren't warnings.

They were instructions.

The house doesn't let its owners leave until they write the next one.

So now I'm sitting at the desk.

The door is locked.

The cupboard is knocking.

And someone is standing behind me.

I don't dare look at the mirror.

I'm sorry, New Owner.

I really am.

But if you're reading this, there's only one thing I can tell you.

I have already written your letter.

And now—

you have to write theirs.