


Tales of the Fly Hunter: Dorm

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Photo by Mo Eid: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/crumpled-blanket-in-dark-room-at-sunset-3337209/>

After school, I entered an institute in another city, in Western Russia and settled in a student hostel — it was of an apartment type that summoned flashbacks from the Soviet past. A sixteen-story “candle”, with four apartments on each floor. I got a bed, a bedside table and a built-in pencil case in a large section of a two-room apartment on the top floor. There were supposed to be four neighbours in the block. However, the neighbours pretty quickly disappeared somewhere — some for practice, some for a male hostel to a loved one. I almost always spent the night alone in an empty block. On the one hand, I, accustomed from childhood to my own room in a huge parental apartment, perceived the absence of neighbours as an unexpected bonus. But after some time, I realized that spending the night alone is not so tempting ... An animal, inexplicable, some kind of otherworldly fear crawled over me every night, especially at the end of the month. My academic focus is dedicated to astronomy, and it feels like some sort of a correlation as the thing happens on the most vivid nights which I am trying to spend looking in the sky.

Then, at the age of 17, I was a fairly independent and rational girl and was afraid of understandable things — beggars, drunks, unexpected pregnancy ... This new fear was of a different nature. At night, someone's presence was clearly felt in the empty block. I spent it on the floor by the telescope and an unfinished bottle of wine. Usually, it happened like this: I lay in bed, trying to sleep. Fear rose from the tips of my toes, went higher up the legs, my hands and stomach went numb, fear pressed on the chest and stuck in my throat with a silent cry. I had to do my best to hold back this scream, close my eyes, endure a few terrible seconds, and it all ended, the fear receded.

Sometimes at night, it was as if someone whistled softly in the ear, and an inexplicable warmth ran through the legs. I didn't see anything, but I felt that there was someone in the room. In addition, it also felt weird to notice swift movements of something tailed, tall and slim in hallways with the corners of my eyes. I understood that I would not be able to tell anyone about this, and not only because they would not believe me, but I was afraid to formulate this fear, to call it by its proper name, as it quite resembled what people in my culture referred to as demons. As if you say "ghost", then it materializes, and you will need to take some decisive action — for example, draw a circle around you with chalk, as in folklore, or sprinkle with holy water. In general, it would be just a sign your own madness. So for starters, I just bought a bottle of cognac and began to treat my nerves by drinking a little "for courage" every evening. In the winter trimester, friends asked me to look after the cat. At night, the animal, mad with fear, with its ears tucked up, trampled on my chest, made terrible uterine sounds and looked at me with huge luminous eyes. I could swear that I was hearing a really dampened hissing sound through the darkness of the night. And it was not the cat making it. The cat seemed to be scared too. After a couple of days, she escaped through the open door and never returned.

After some more time, I again received proof that no one stays long in my damn block. Mom came to a hostel friend, and her neighbour asked me for a stay for a couple of days. I gladly agreed. She spent one night, disappeared early in the morning, and in the evening of the next day she appeared drunk. "I will have to spend the night with you again tonight, and I prepared myself," she said. I did not ask her about anything, she herself began a confusing conversation. From it, it followed that "this block appears vicious, and no one wants to live in it since it almost always stays empty. A few years ago, a girl hanged herself in this closet after talks about aliens from the deep". A few days later I went on vacation with my parents, and when I returned, I rented an apartment. I didn't show up at the dorm again (I left a bunch of things in that room, including the TV, to escape). Since then, I have developed a strange skill — I "feel" the home. Immediately I intuitively determine whether it will be good for me in this place or not. And this feeling has never let me down.