

DARK ECHO

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EXT. BACK ALLEY BEHIND APARTMENT - NIGHT

A narrow alley. Humming streetlights. A lone MOPED ticks as it cools.

NISHA (hoodie up) drags a cracked CARDBOARD BOX from a dumpster.

She freezes. A metallic RASP echoes -- a vent fan? Or a whisper?

NISHA
(to herself, barely audible)
Don't look back.

She folds the box, stuffs inside: a small DIGITAL RECORDER with red tape

across it: "D-ROOM." Footsteps scrape nearby. Nisha bolts.

A SHADOW crosses the brick wall -- the silhouette looks like DEV.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT 3B - NIGHT

Dark. The only light: a FISH TANK glow.

NISHA locks the door. DEV sits at the table, fiddling with a ring of KEYS.

DEV
Where were you? It's past midnight.

NISHA
I heard it again. In the vents. The voice that knows my name.

DEV
We talked about this. The doctor said--

The bathroom fan kicks on by itself. Both turn. Silence.

DEV (CONT'D)
I changed the locks. If someone has a spare key -- that ends tonight.

He lifts a small metal KEY labeled "D." Nisha's eyes fix on it.

NISHA
That's not ours.

The fan stops. A muffled KNOCK from the ceiling. Three beats.
Tap. Tap. Tap.

NISHA (CONT'D)
That pattern. Same as the recording.

DEV pockets the "D" key, uneasy.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Bare concrete. Emergency light flickers. NISHA hurries down.
KIRAN, hoodie and
backpack, appears holding a TOOL ROLL and a tiny ENDOSCOPE
camera.

KIRAN
You texted? I brought the scope. We can check the
vent chase.

NISHA
If it's a person, we call the cops. If it's...
something else—

KIRAN
Then we stop feeding it your fear.

They pry open a VENT GRATE. Air hisses. A narrow, dark shaft.

KIRAN (CONT'D)
Ready?

Nisha nods. He snakes the camera inside. On his phone:
darkness—then a GLINT
of metal. A key ring. One key labeled "D." Another labeled "R."

NISHA
R... for Rhea.

KIRAN
Your sister?

NISHA

She moved out months ago. Took her things. We haven't spoken since.

A distant metallic LAUGH trickles through the shaft – or just warped fan noise.

KIRAN
That's not just air.

They kill the light; the phone screen shows a SMUDGE of a FACE for one frame– then static. Nisha yanks the cable; the image freezes on a distorted grin.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROOFTOP – NIGHT

Wind. The city hums below. A humming VENT STACK rises center stage.

DEV bursts from the door, finds NISHA already there, gripping the recorder.

DEV
You shouldn't be up here.

NISHA
Neither should you. Why is your key in the vents? Why is there one for Rhea? What did you two lock away?

The rooftop door creaks again. RHEA steps out, pale, guarded.

RHEA
Because you asked us to.

Nisha falters.

RHEA (CONT'D)
The doctor said externalize the episodes. Lock the triggers. You said you didn't want to remember the D-ROOM. We hid the keys in the vents.

DEV

We were trying to help you sleep.

Nisha's recorder – the one from the alley – BLIPS red. A distorted whisper leaks out: NISHA'S OWN VOICE, low and predatory.

RECORDER (NISHA'S VOICE)

Don't look back.

A beam of light sweeps across them. OFFICER MALIK and MR. VARMA emerge from the stair door.

OFFICER MALIK

Evening. We got a call. Neighbors heard banging. Everyone step away from the edge.

MR. VARMA

I told you. Too much noise from 3B. Strange hours.

NISHA

The vents are talking. The D-room is–

RHEA

Nisha, breathe. Look at me.

Wind moans through the vent stack. Taps echo: Tap. Tap. Tap.

DEV

It's a broken damper. That's all.

The recorder clicks off. Darkness thickens. Nisha edges toward the vent.

OFFICER MALIK

Ma'am–

Nisha holds the recorder over the vent. Listens. A hush. Then a soft, childlike version of her voice: "I'm still here."

NISHA

If you locked my fear away, why is it still inside the walls?

RHEA

Because the walls are you. That's what the doctor said.

A final COLD WIND surges, slamming the stair door shut. Everyone jumps.

INT. APARTMENT 3B - DAY

An overcast morning. Quiet. NISHA sits at the table. No fish tank glow.

The recorder rests between two keys: "D" and "R."

RHEA pours tea. DEV stands by the window, tired.

RHEA

We can bring the doctor back. Start again. No vents. No hiding.

We keep the keys on the table.

DEV

We change the locks again. New ones. No letters.

Nisha studies the recorder, presses PLAY. Silence. She exhales.

NISHA

Tonight I'll sleep with the lights off.

A soft, almost polite KNOCK comes from the ceiling.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

The morning light thins as a cloud crosses the sun.

FADE OUT.

TITLE OVER BLACK: THE ECHO LIVES WHERE YOU HIDE IT.