UNDERNEATH

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INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Darkness. The sound of BREATHING. Panicked, shallow.

A phone screen ILLUMINATES: 12:00 AM.

AVA (25, a bit overweight, plain) jolts awake. Her eyes are suddenly wide open.

She's lying on top of the covers of a small bed. The sheets beneath her are dingy, wrinkled. She's wearing jeans and a t-shirt.

The room around her is somehow wrong. Like a stage set. Bare walls. A single bare bulb hanging from the ceiling, currently off. Moonlight filters through filthy windows.

AVA
Where...

Her PHONE BUZZES on the nightstand.

She flinches. Reaches for it slowly.

One notification: VOICEMAIL (no caller ID)

Presses play.

The voice that comes through is her own.

VOICEMAIL (V.O.)
Ava if you get this, it's not your first time here. I know you don't remember. You never do. But there's still time before midnight. Don't let it touch your feet. And whatever you do, don't look under the bed.

Ava stares at the phone. Her hand is shaking.

AVA
What the fuck?

She sits up slowly, bare feet hovering above the floor. She looks down at the space between the bed and the floor.

Nothing there. She stands cautiously.

Ava looks around. It's a studio apartment, maybe 400 square feet. There's the bed in one corner. A sagging, stained couch against one wall. A small kitchenette. An exterior door.

Everything is covered in dust.

AVA (CONT'D)
Nobody lives here.

She walks to the front door. Tries the handle. Locked. Or stuck.

She moves to the window. It's covered with grime on both sides. She tries to lift it. Doesn't budge. She rubs at the glass with her sleeve, trying to see outside.

All she can make out are vague shapes. Buildings maybe. Streetlights.

AVA (CONT'D)
(calling out)
Hello? Is anyone out there?

Nothing. She turns back to the room. That's when she notices the MIRROR.

It's full-length, hanging crooked on the wall opposite the bed. The frame is old, ornate. Victorian maybe. Completely out of place in this empty room.

Ava approaches it slowly. Her reflection looks back at her. But something's off.

She leans closer. The Ava in the mirror is... younger. Not dramatically so, but noticeable. Maybe twenty. Shorter hair.

AVA (CONT'D)
That's not...

She waves. The reflection waves.

She touches her face. The reflection does too.

Same movement. Same timing. But wrong face.

AVA (CONT'D)
Okay. Okay, this is... I'm dreaming. I'm definitely dreaming.

She backs away from the mirror.

Checks her phone again: 11:47 PM.

She grabs her phone and opens her recent calls. Nothing. Opens messages. Empty. Opens photos.

The photo library is there, but it only goes back a few hours. Before that? Nothing. In the photo she's in this same apartment, holding up a piece of paper to the camera.

The paper reads: "YOU KEEP FORGETTING. CHECK THE CABINETS."

AVA (CONT'D)
Jesus.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHENETTE - MOMENTS LATER

Ava opens the first cabinet.

A single water glass sits inside. Clean, while everything else is filthy.

There's a yellow POST-IT NOTE stuck to it.

She peels it off.

The handwriting is hers. Rushed:

"You've done this before. More times than you can count. Face it this time. Face her!"

AVA
Her?

In the third cabinet she finds another POST-IT.

"It started when you were seven. You hid under the bed. She found you. She never left."

Ava's breathing quickens.

AVA (CONT'D)
This isn't real. This is not...

She opens the cabinet under the sink.

A CHILD'S SHOE sits inside. Small. Pink. Velcro strap.

Ava recognizes it. She doesn't know how, but she does.

AVA (CONT'D)
No.

She backs away from the kitchenette. Checks her phone: 11:51 PM. She looks back at the mirror. The reflection has changed.

INT. APARTMENT - MIRROR REFLECTION - SAME TIME

In the mirror, the apartment looks different. Warmer. Lived in. There's a small pink rug on the floor. Stuffed animals on the bed.

And in the reflection, sitting cross-legged on the floor:

YOUNG AVA (7 years old) plays with dolls. She's humming. A door opens in the reflection. AVA'S MOTHER (30s, tired,) peeks in.

MOTHER
Time for bed, sweetheart.

YOUNG AVA
Already?

MOTHER
It's almost midnight. You know the rule.

YOUNG AVA
(small voice)
Mommy, will you check under the bed first?

Mother's expression tightens just a bit. Then she smiles.

MOTHER
Honey, we've talked about this. There's nothing under the bed. Monsters aren't real.

YOUNG AVA
But I heard it. I heard it breathing.

MOTHER
That was just the radiator. Come on, I'll prove it to you.

Mother walks into the room. Bends down. Lifts the bedskirt. Barely. She doesn't actually look underneath.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
See? Nothing there. Now up you go. Teeth brushed?

Young Ava nods, unconvinced.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Good girl. Sleep tight.

Mother kisses her forehead. Leaves. Closes the door. Young Ava sits on the edge of the bed, staring at the dark space between the bed and floor. She's terrified.

Ava watches this, transfixed.

AVA
I remember this.

In the mirror, Young Ava climbs into bed. Pulls the covers up to her chin. She's trying to keep her feet away from the edge.

AVA (CONT'D)
I remember being so scared.

In the mirror, young Ava's eyes are wide.

And then

A HAND. Small, child-sized, but fingers too long, too pale, reaches from under the bed in the reflection. Young Ava SCREAMS.

Present-day Ava GASPS.

The mirror image DISTORTS, ripples. And returns to normal. Just Ava's current reflection staring back, horrified.

She checks her phone: 11:58 PM.

AVA (CONT'D)
Don't look under the bed. Don't look under the bed. Don't—

She looks at the bed.

There's something DRIPPING from underneath it.

Black. Viscous. Like oil or tar.

It's pooling slowly on the hardwood floor.

AVA (CONT'D)
Oh god.

Her phone shows: 11:59 PM.

The single lightbulb overhead begins to FLICKER.

AVA (CONT'D)
No, no, no—

The apartment DARKENS. The moonlight through the windows seems to retreat.

Her phone screen: 12:00 AM.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ava jolts awake as before.

AVA
I remember! Oh god. I remember!

The sound of something MOVING. Under the bed.

A RUSTLING. Like fabric dragging across wood.

AVA (CONT'D)
Please, no.

Then, from beneath the bed, a VOICE.

A child's voice. Ava's voice, at seven years old.

YOUNG AVA (O.S.)
Ava?

Adult Ava's breath catches.

YOUNG AVA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Ava, are you there? I'm scared.

AVA
(barely audible)
This isn't real.

YOUNG AVA (O.S.)
She got me, Ava. She got me because you weren't brave. You let her take me.

AVA
I was seven years old.

YOUNG AVA (O.S.)
And now I'm always seven years old. Always under the bed. Always waiting.

The sound of something dragging closer.

YOUNG AVA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Why won't you look at me?

AVA
Because you're not real!

YOUNG AVA (O.S.)
(starting to cry)
I'm real. I'm so real. I've been here the whole time and you just keep forgetting. Every night you wake up and forget and I'm still here. Still under the bed.

After a long beat, young Ava continues

YOUNG AVA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Do you really remember? Finally?

AVA
Yes! Yes, I think I do!

YOUNG AVA (O.S.)
Good. Now look at me. Please?

Ava looks at the bed. The black liquid is still pooling underneath.

AVA
I can't.

YOUNG AVA (O.S.)
You have to. Or you'll be in here forever. Just like me.

Ava's phone BUZZES.

She looks down. A new voicemail. From herself. She doesn't play it, puts the phone on the counter.

She approaches the bed slowly.

Kneels down.

Reaches for the bedskirt.

Her hand is shaking so badly she can barely grip.

AVA
Okay. Okay. I'm going to look. I'm going to face it.

She lifts the bedskirt.

UNDER THE BED - SAME TIME

Darkness. But not empty. Something is there. A SHAPE. Small. Curled into a fetal position. It's YOUNG AVA, but wrong. Her skin is gray. Her nightgown is filthy. Her hair is matted.

But worst of all is her eyes.

They're OPEN. Staring. But the pupils are completely white.

She smiles.

YOUNG AVA
There you are.

INT. APARTMENT - SAME TIME

Adult Ava SCREAMS. Drops the bedskirt. Scrambles backward.

She crashes into the kitchenette counter.

When she looks back

The bed is MOVING.

Not shaking. RISING. Like something beneath it is pushing up.

The black liquid is spreading across the floor now, moving toward her feet.

The mirror on the wall CRACKS.

She spins around.

In the fractured reflection she sees herself. But older. Much older. Gray hair. Lined face. Seventy, eighty years old.

Old Ava mouths something: "You can't leave."

The bed is still rising. Whatever's under there is STANDING UP.

AVA
(panicked)
What do you want?

YOUNG AVA (O.S.)
Do you remember that night. When Mom checked under the bed. She didn't really look. Because she knew. She always knew.

AVA
Knew what?

YOUNG AVA
That monsters are real. That they live under the bed.

AVA
No! That’s crazy! What do I do? How do I fix this?

YOUNG AVA
You can't. It's too late for fixing. But you can stop forgetting.

AVA
I don't want to forget.

YOUNG AVA
Everyone wants to forget. That's why midnight keeps coming.

Young Ava comes out from under the bed and stands, reaches for Ava.

YOUNG AVA (CONT’D)
Take my hand. Come under the bed with me. Stay in the dark. Stop running from it.

AVA
(barely audible)
And then what?

YOUNG AVA
Then you remember. Forever. And maybe, maybe I can rest.

Ava stares at the hand, looks at the mirror.

In it, dozens of AVAs. All different ages. All trapped in the reflection.

All of them are REACHING TOWARD HER.

AVA
If I take your hand

YOUNG AVA
You won't wake up again. No more loops. No more forgetting.

AVA
I'll be...

YOUNG AVA
Under the bed. With me. Where you always belonged.

She reaches out slowly.

Their fingers touch.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT

The room is empty now. No Ava, and it’s eerily quiet.

The PHONE buzzes on the nightstand. Sits there, unanswered.

Eventually, the screen goes dark. Silence.

Then the sound of BREATHING from under the bed. Two sets of breathe. One older. One younger.

And then HUMMING. A child's voice, humming a lullaby. Then joined by an adult voice. They hum together in the darkness.

The front door CREAKS open on its own.

Phone BUZZES.

VOICEMAIL (V.O.)
If you're hearing this, it's not your first time...

THE END