

Forsythia Chang's Exorcise Plan in 5 Easy Steps

By [Thomas Yeung](#)

She rattled the doorknob as they entered, my first sign that the living had returned. Tanja and Cam shuffled into the house, as if in their youthful uncertainty they were either afraid to disturb me or felt they could somehow take me by surprise. With their steps halting as they crossed the threshold and Cam's deep intake of breath, it was terror at its most mannerly. It was similar to the way Bryan used to open the doors in the house after we had a fight.

God, I miss that man. I hate the way he discovered my body, and hope he found someone else. For some reason, I'm picturing a two bed+den in north Toronto, a new condo build, and she's a public school teacher that added him to her benefits plan.

The click of high heels on the front porch meant there was somebody new. I could tell, because Tanja only wears sneakers. Miss Helena swept into the foyer, with not even a perfunctory invitation from the living residents. Her auburn hair was tied back tightly, her fur-lined duster cape held at the neck with a silver coatpin in the shape of a tiny sword. She clutched a leather-bound journal in her right hand, brown and worn with an embedded ornamental ruby. Cam and Tanja kept a long storage ottoman by the front door; Helena sat down and waived off the young couple, who gratefully retreated back to the car. She placed her coatpin on the floor. It turned, creakingly, until the blade pointed straight at me. I could not move. Helena began writing in her journal, not looking up for nearly an hour. Then she spoke.

"I'm sorry, but I don't know how to help you."

This was my fault. After a year of peaceful cohabitation, it was a moment's inattention that had first alerted the young couple to my presence three weeks ago. Tanja was alone in the ground-level guest bathroom, wiping down the mirror. I was idly strolling down the hallway. She looked up as I passed. It was then that I learned two things:

1. Ghosts can be seen in reflective surfaces when there is sufficient natural light; and
2. When you are spotted, do not turn your head and make eye contact. It makes the situation much worse.

We both screamed and ran in opposite directions. When Cam came home he found Tanja sitting on the porch, still shaking four hours later. He handled the news fairly well: as goal-oriented as tax accountants are, he nipped into the house and exited 30 minutes later with two fully yet hastily packed suitcases. That was the last I saw of them until now.

Helena spoke again.

"I know who you are, and how you died. Your name is Forsythia. Your art exhibition received a scathing review, and you fell off a ladder while dusting in a fit of rage. Feel free to correct me if I'm wrong."

I wanted to run, but the silver blade pinned me to my place on the wall.

"They brought me here to help you move on. Unfortunately, I see no purpose to you. Your life was unremarkable, and you seem to be at peace.

"So we need to work together. You cannot assert yourself here anymore. She has a child on the way, and I will not permit you to cause them any more distress."

While she could not "advance me," as she termed it, she had dealt with this before. She would visit, free of charge, every three months and reassure Cam and Tanja that I remained exorcised. I would remain, however, but out of sight and mind. No mirrors. Helena told me how to will myself to sleep as I did in my life, as to not wander the house in darkness. There were other conditions, but this was the essence of our pact.

As dark secrets go, it worked. Cam and Tanja returned, and after several years they soon forgot me.

Yet, I was not forgotten entirely. They brought Ava home the February after the exorcism. I stayed as far away from her as possible, but as the years passed we could not ignore each other entirely.

I know Ava sees me, because I see myself in her paintings. She glances over her shoulder sometimes as she works, and smiles. She knows why I'm here, and she's brilliant because of it. I am inspiration.

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