

STRANGE HOUSES

UKETSU

Translated from the Japanese by Jim Rion



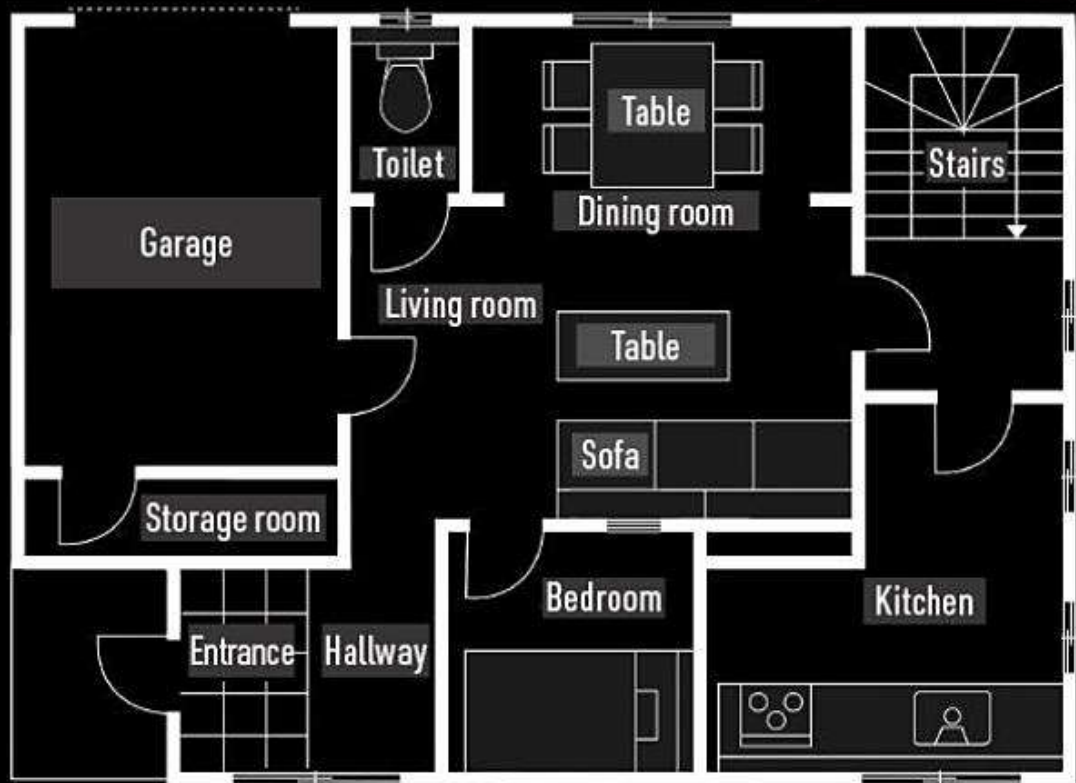
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SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



This is the floor plan of a certain house.

Do you see anything strange about it?

At first glance, it probably looks totally normal, like a house anyone might live in. But if you look very closely, you might notice things here and there that seem somehow . . . off. Those 'off' details pile up and link together to lead to one inescapable truth.

A truth so terrifying, you won't want to believe it.

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A MESSAGE FROM A FRIEND

I'm a freelance writer, my specialty being stories of the macabre. Given this line of work, lots of people approach me with their personal experiences of the eerie and unpleasant.

Lots of these have to do with houses.

'I keep hearing footsteps on the second floor, even when no one else is home.'

'I can feel someone watching me when I'm alone.'

'There are voices coming from the wardrobe.'

I can't tell you how many people have told me their scary house stories.

But none of them can compare to the houses in this story. These strange, strange houses.

. . .

It all started in September 2019. A friend of mine, Yanaoka, messaged me in need of some advice. Yanaoka's a sales representative with an editing and production company. We've known each other for a few years and get together on occasion for dinner.

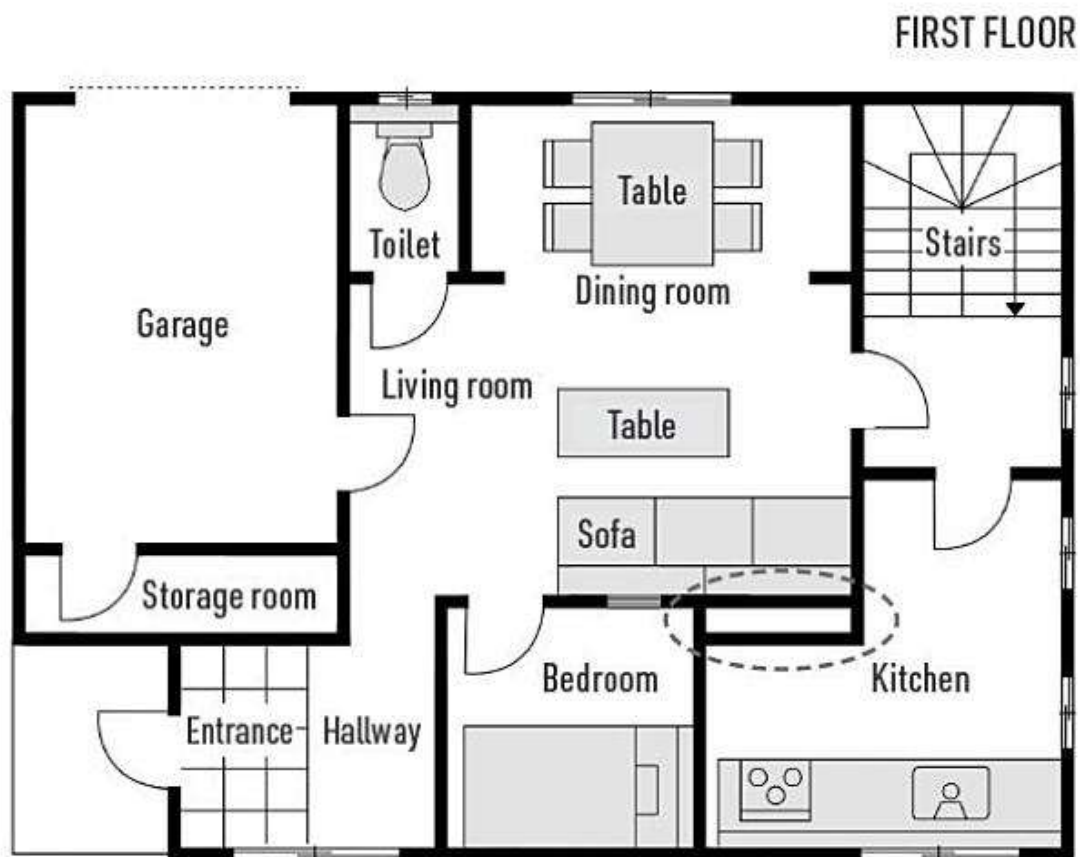
He told me that he and his wife were expecting their first child, so they had begun to search for their first house. Finding a good family home is hard work, he said, having spent many a

late night scrolling through listings. Then, finally, he came across something that looked ideal.

It was a two-storey house in a quiet residential street, near a station but not far from forested hillsides, and although it was officially preowned, it was still very new. The couple went to see it, and it was so spacious and bright that they both fell in love.

But there was one thing on the floor plan that bothered them.

On the first floor, there was a mysterious dead space between the kitchen and living room.



It had no doors, so it was completely inaccessible. The couple asked the realtors for an explanation, but, clueless, they didn't have one to offer. It was nothing that would affect the couple if they lived there, but something about it felt unsettling, so they decided to hold off pursuing the property for the time being.

Yanaoka said he decided to consult with me since I 'know a lot about weird things'. I admit that I did find myself attracted by the words 'mysterious dead space'. But I don't know the first thing about architecture, and I'm not even sure I know how to properly read a floor plan.

So, I decided to get some help.

KURIHARA

Among my acquaintances is a man named Kurihara. Not only is he a draughtsman with a prestigious architecture firm, but also a fellow fan of horror and mystery stories, so I thought he might be interested in this.

I emailed him the details and a copy of the floor plan Yanaoka had sent, and we decided to talk things over on the phone.

Here is a transcript of our conversation:

AUTHOR: Good to talk to you again, Kurihara. Thanks for taking the time. I know you're busy.

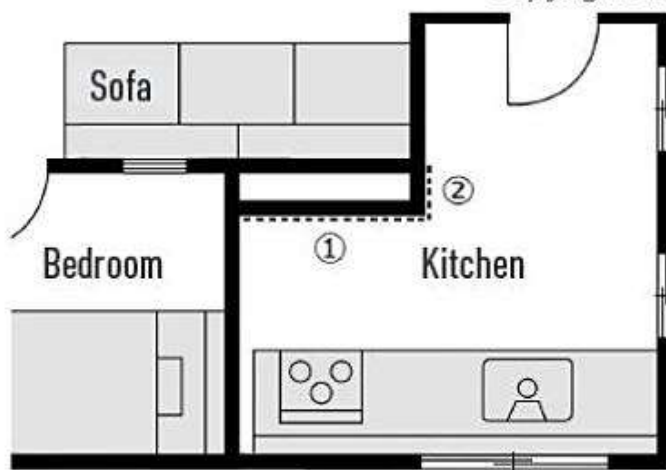
KURIHARA: Not at all. Now, about that floor plan you sent. . . .

AUTHOR: Right! My friend's wondering about that dead space on the first floor. Do you have any idea what it might be?

KURIHARA: Hmm . . . one thing I can confidently say is, it was put there intentionally.

AUTHOR: You think someone wanted it?

KURIHARA: They must have. If you look closely, you can see that it was created by building two walls that otherwise serve no purpose.



Those two walls in the kitchen, do you see? Without those, there's no dead space, and the kitchen would have actually been bigger. They actively built walls that made the kitchen

smaller. Clearly, the space must have been put there for a reason.

AUTHOR: I see what you mean. So, what do you think they might have needed it for?

KURIHARA: Maybe they had intended it to be a storage space at first.

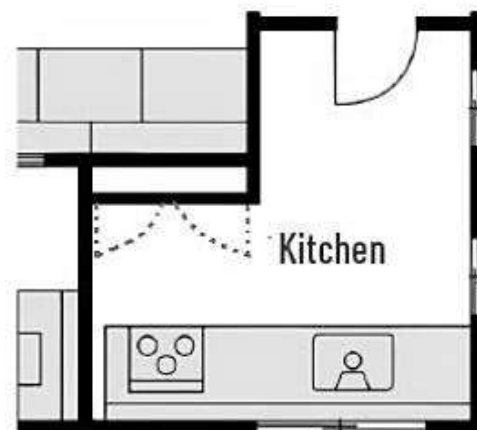
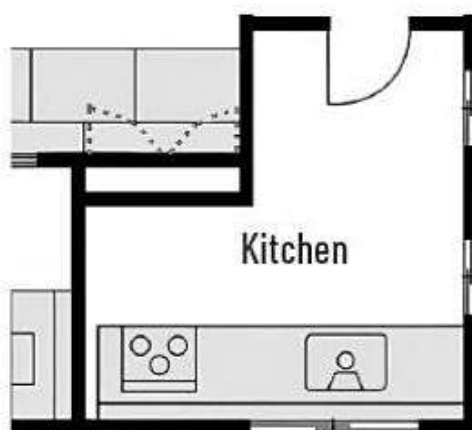
If they had put doors opening onto the living room, it could have been a cupboard; or a set on the kitchen side could have made a pantry. But then maybe they changed their minds, or ran out of money or something, and gave up on the idea.

AUTHOR: I see. Since they were already in the middle of construction, then, you think they just left it there without altering the plan?

KURIHARA: It seems a natural explanation.

AUTHOR: So, there's nothing ominous or creepy about it at all . . .

KURIHARA: I suppose not. It's just . . .



Kurihara's tone suddenly turned sombre.

KURIHARA: Do you know who had this house built?

AUTHOR: The previous owners. I heard it was a family of three, a couple with a small child.

KURIHARA: Small . . . how small? Do you know how old the child was?

AUTHOR: I'm afraid I didn't ask. What's that got to do with anything?

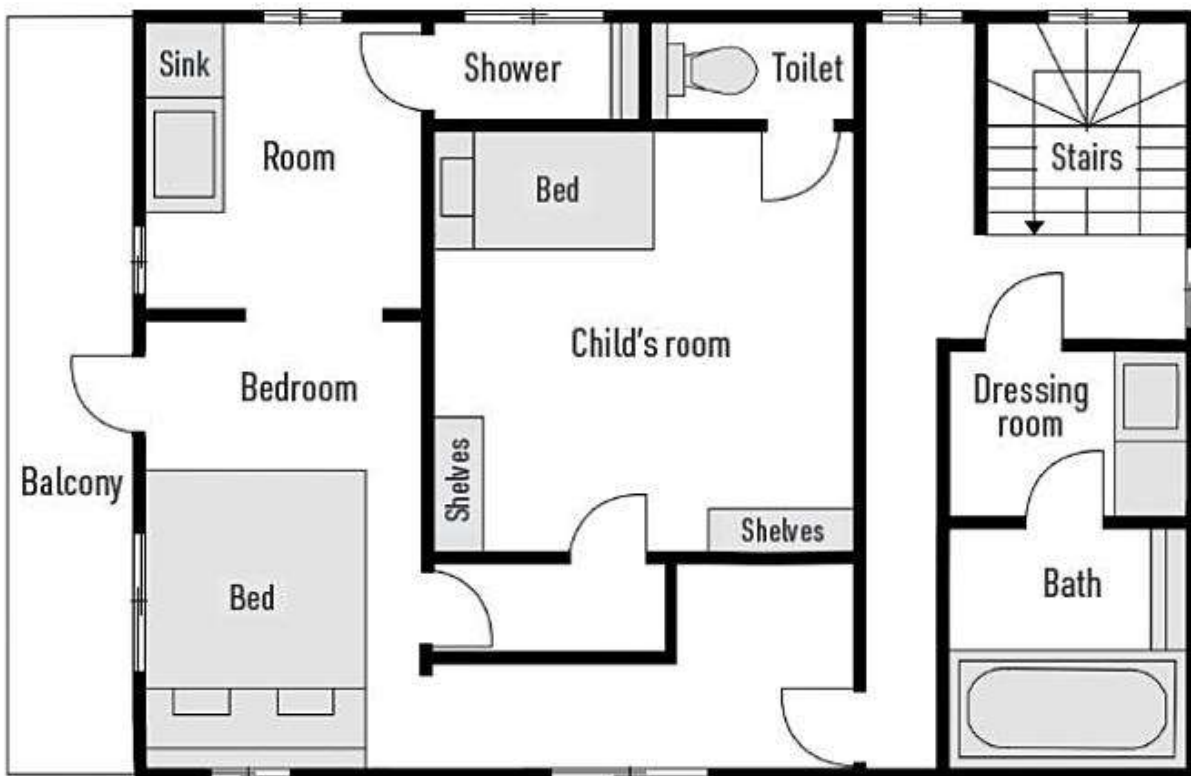
KURIHARA: To tell the truth, I thought there was something seriously off about this house the moment I saw the plan.

AUTHOR: You did? What? I didn't notice anything, apart from that dead space.

KURIHARA: The second floor is all wrong. Look at the child's room. Do you notice anything odd about it?

AUTHOR: Well . . . wait, hold on a minute.

SECOND FLOOR



I finally understood what he was getting at.

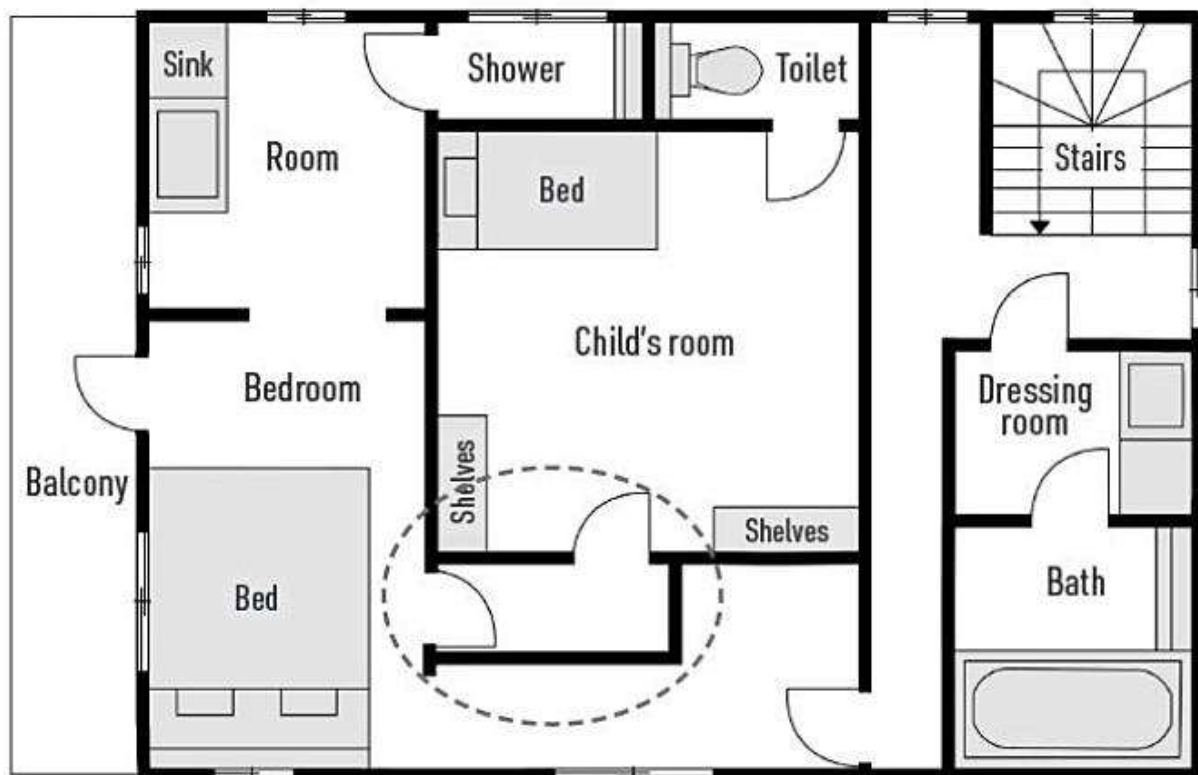
AUTHOR: There are two doors, with a small hallway between!

KURIHARA: Exactly. The child's room has a vestibule outside the door, which is very unusual for a private home.

And the location of the entrance to that child's room is strange, too. If you came up from the first floor, you'd have to walk all the way around to the other side of the house to get to the kid's room. Why make it so much trouble?

AUTHOR: That is odd.

KURIHARA: And the room doesn't have a single window.





UKETSU

is an enigmatic presence on YouTube and an author specializing in horror and mystery. He always appears in videos wearing a white mask and black body stocking, with his voice digitally distorted. His true identity is unknown. His novels, *Strange Pictures* and *Strange Houses*, were massive hits in Japan, where he lives.

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