Maya sat up slowly, blinking as early light spilled across her bedroom floor like warm syrup. Her room held the stillness of a painting — everything in place, everything familiar. But something tugged at the edge of her awareness, a quiet wrongness she couldn’t quite name.

She stepped out of bed and stretched, feeling the cool air nip at her bare arms. As she turned toward the window, her eyes caught something that made her freeze.

Her shadow.

It wasn’t following her.

It stood there, shaped like her, but just slightly behind — out of rhythm. When she turned her head, it delayed. When she stepped left, it hesitated. The movements were close, but off, like watching a video buffer and lag. A chill uncoiled in her spine, slow and steady.

She blinked and looked again. It adjusted, catching up to her, suddenly perfect — like it knew it had been caught.

At breakfast, she didn’t mention it. What would she even say? Her mom rushed between coffee and emails, her little brother kicking his legs under the table, spilling milk like usual. Everything normal. But as Maya stood to leave for school, her eyes fell on the floor again.

The shadow was still off. No one else noticed.

At school, she tested it in quiet moments — lifting her hand during class, turning her head during lunch — and every time, the shadow reacted just a second too late. No one around her seemed to see it. Not her friends, not her teachers. Just her.

By the end of the day, she couldn’t shake the feeling that it was more than just weird sunlight or a trick of the eye. It felt intentional. Like it was trying to keep her attention.

After school, instead of walking home, she turned toward the public library. The air outside was sharp with the early bite of autumn, and she pulled her sleeves over her hands as she walked.

Inside the library, the air smelled like dust and old paper — quiet, calm, comforting. She searched the catalog for anything she could think of: “shadow delay,” “shadow not matching movements,” “visual illusions.” She flipped through books about light, human perception, even folklore.

Most of it made no sense, or felt like stretching — myths about spirits stuck to people, superstitions about shadows being tied to memory, or reflections of hidden thoughts. One line caught her attention though, from a worn psychology text:

"In some rare cases, the brain registers time and movement unevenly during heightened self-awareness, resulting in a sensation of being slightly 'out of sync' with one's own reflection or shadow."

It was the first explanation that didn’t sound like fantasy — but it didn’t feel like enough. Because this wasn’t a *sensation*. She could *see* it. Over and over. And no matter what science or superstition tried to say, the simple truth stuck with her:

Only she could see it.

By the time she got home, the sky was draining into soft purple. In her room, she stood in the center of the floor and watched as her shadow crawled along the wall behind her — just a fraction too slow, like it didn’t want to be seen moving on its own.

She didn’t speak to it. She didn’t have to. It wasn’t a hallucation or a voice in her head.

It was her shadow — and it was *watching* her, just as much as she was watching it.

And for now, that strange, quiet balance was enough.