

PROMPT #1: Your polite new neighbors who just moved in next door have suspiciously pointed ears and speak a language that you can't find on Google Translate.

[untitled]

by **Irina Perfilova**

It was a rainy fall day – mild wind, yellow leaves, and light tapping of rain against the window matched the vibe of my thoughts. Most people around here were already caught up in their Thanksgiving preparations, caught in their routines, and barely noticed the world around them. My partner and I had recently moved to this cozy neighborhood just outside Seattle, fulfilling a long-held dream of living in the Pacific Northwest. It is a region you either love or find overwhelming. My friend once told me, that fall is a season that inspires some and leaves others sad. By mid-November, we'd already met almost all of our neighbors—most of them warm, friendly folks who made us feel at home. Except for the house right next door. That one stood silent and empty.

Until that day.

I glanced out from my desk, where I was working on my dissertation, and noticed a moving truck parked in the driveway next door. Two figures moved back and forth, unloading boxes. As I watched, another moving truck pulled up to the house, reminding me of the chaos and exhaustion of our own move. My attention shifted back to the figures—they were captivating, even from a distance, their movements fluid and almost unnaturally graceful. Intrigued, I made a mental note to introduce myself later.

Later came sooner than expected. A knock at the door startled me from my work. Opening it, I found the couple from next door standing there, soaked from the rain but wearing warm smiles.

“Hi,” the man said, his voice carrying a smooth, almost musical quality. “We’re your new neighbors and wanted to say hello.”

The woman handed me a basket of pastries that smelled like a fresh bakery. “We’re Lirian and Mitsy,” she said.

“Irina,” I replied, smiling back. “Welcome to the neighborhood!”

They didn’t stay long, but I couldn’t shake the feeling that there was something... different about them. Their sharp features, their subtle accents (I could guess that English is not their first language), and their pointed ears—it all seemed just slightly out of place.

Over the next few days, I couldn’t help but notice more about them. Lirian spent hours in the garden, humming melodies that seemed to linger in the air as if the trees themselves were listening. Meanwhile, Mitsy painted by the window, her brush gliding across the canvas with a mesmerizing confidence. The walls of the room were covered with all different canvases, of various sizes and colors. Once, I focused on her work, I saw a breathtaking forest scene, alive with wild animals, radiating a serene energy. For a moment, I was lost in the tranquility of the atmosphere. That energy was flowing from inside of the house.

Curiosity got the better of me. I tried Googling their names, their accents, and even snippets of the strange language I overheard them speaking. Nothing. It was as if they didn’t exist.

One evening, I saw Lirian under the moonlight, tending to plants that gave off a faint glow. It was mesmerizing and more than a little mysterious. The next day, I decided to stop by under the pretense of borrowing sugar.

Mitsy welcomed me in, and as I stepped inside, my breath caught. Their home was a gallery of creativity—paintings, sculptures, and sketches adorned every corner, each piece of art was so unique and captivating. It all seemed to radiate with an unseen energy.

“You made all this?” I asked, my voice filled with awe.

She nodded. “Art is...how I remember,” she said softly, her tone hinting at a depth I couldn’t yet understand.

My eyes fell on a sketch leaning against the wall. It was unmistakable—Luna Ferrell’s work. The legendary artist whose dreamy, ethereal landscapes had attracted millions of people around the globe. As a teenager, I had spent hours poring over Luna’s art books, trying to replicate the magic in my own amateur attempts. However, my art was so far from that legendary artwork. My mind immediately went through my collections of Luna’s work over the years, and I could not believe I just met someone who admired her work as much as I did.

“You’re a fan of Luna Ferrell?” I asked, my heart pounding.

Mitsy exchanged a glance with Lirian, who gave a small nod. She turned back to me with

a faint smile. “Luna Ferrell...was a name I used to go by. But that life feels like a different world now.”

I froze. “You’re Luna Ferrell?”

She nodded. “I left that behind years ago. I needed to create for myself again, without the weight of expectations.”

My mind raced, trying to reconcile the person in front of me with the legendary artist I had idolized. “Your work—it inspired me to start painting. You’re the reason I fell in love with art.”

Her smile softened, and for the first time, I saw the vulnerability behind her brilliance.

In the weeks that followed, Misty became more than a neighbor. She became a mentor, teaching me to see creativity as an act of freedom rather than perfection. Her lessons stayed with me long after the rain stopped and the leaves fell.

It was a rainy winter day; I woke up late that morning lacking a warm cup of coffee. I heard a loud noise outside, as I went to look out the window, a moving truck was on the road leaving Luna’s house. At first, I thought I was still dreaming I was not. I could not believe my eyes... it seemed that my neighbors had moved overnight. Different thoughts were filling my mind: “I spoke to her yesterday and she did not mention anything about leaving”, “are they okay?”, “Should I reach out or check the house?”. Shortly after I realized, I had no way to contact Mitsy or Lirian. There was no sign that they lived there. The house became silent and empty.

Was it all a dream?

Although I never fully discovered the mystery of their pointed ears, Lirian’s haunting melodies, or glowing garden, one thing was clear: meeting them changed me in ways I couldn’t have imagined.