

Night Terror

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Rest doesn't come easy. It never did. When I was a kid, I used to have these night terrors; at least that's what they called them. They didn't happen all the time, but like a couple times a month I'd completely flip my shit. I'd see this thing and the next thing I knew I was screaming and crying and I couldn't go back into my room for like days after they happened. They got better, but not on their own.

My parents used to send me to therapy every week for them. The therapist told me to repeat "it's not real" and "it's all in my head" until I believed it. Thing was, it didn't work for me. I got that the human brain could come up with some pretty fucked up stuff, but there were limits to what it could produce. There had to be. I just couldn't believe it was all in my head, that sounded insane. And since the stuff couldn't all be in my head, that meant it had to be real, which was even scarier. I remember the day I came to that conclusion. I was eight. I remember going into my room and getting into bed. God, I did not want to be in there alone.

I lay in bed, way too scared to turn off my lamp. I pulled my covers as high as they'd go, leaving only my eyes visible. I remember looking at the clock: it was past midnight. In that moment, I was more scared of what my parents would say if they found out I'd been up past 10:00 than I was of anything a night terror could throw at me. I clicked off my lamp and my room went dark. I looked around the room, certain something hid in every shadow; but nothing moved. My room was still. I remember thinking that maybe it was all in my head. It took like an hour, but I finally got to sleep.

I remember darkness, then a sound. My eyes opened immediately. I looked around my room, shrinking back into my headboard. My room was cold, colder than it should've been. I looked towards my window: it was open. Something was in there. The curtains fluttered in the breeze, and the area around my window was illuminated by a dim streetlamp. I heard a creak. I squeezed my eyes as tight as they went. I didn't want to see it again. Another creak. That one sounded closer. I pulled the blankets tighter around me. Silence. I opened my eyes so that only a sliver of my room was visible. I remember scanning the room, ready to see it any second. I opened my eyes wider, trying to focus on the dark room. Still nothing. I had almost convinced myself that it was

the cat walking across the hardwood when I heard it again. It sounded significantly heavier than a cat.

I squeezed my eyes shut again. I've never been religious, but I remember praying to whatever was listening to make it go away. Another creak. I heard the soft thud of skin meeting floor as it dragged itself closer. I closed my eyes tighter. The thudding stopped. I heard air being sucked in, then hissed out. It was breathing. God, I felt like I could feel its hot breath on my toes. "It's not real." "It's all in your head." I heard the sound of fingernails dragging on wood, then a click as it grabbed something. "It's not real." I felt it grab me.

My eyes shot open and the air left my lungs. A cold, bony hand with elongated fingers held my foot. I looked at its face and I felt my heart clench in my chest. I yanked my foot back. It was looking me with its sunken eyes. I couldn't breathe. It leaned forward, reaching for me with a thin, elongated arm. I remember the way its mouth looked as it breathed: it was shriveled, its lips sunken back into nothing. "It's not real."

It dragged itself further onto the foot of my bed. My heart was beating so fucking fast, it felt like it would fall out of my chest. It opened its mouth, letting out a hiss of breath. It reached forward, touching my knee with its long fingers. "This is real." I screamed. The sound must've shocked it, because it shrunk back, the shape of its hunched spine clearly visible in the light of the street lamp. I heard my parents running to my room. It looked at me, like really looked at me, and hissed. My heart stopped. My parents footsteps grew closer. It crawled away, climbing onto my windowsill. I still remember the way it looked, perched there like some owl from hell, its shoulder blades so prominent that they almost looked like wings. It let out a final hiss before jumping to the ground two stories below. My door slammed open, and my parents rushed to me. They looked so worried. God, I must've looked horrible.

It's been 18 years since that night. After that last time, the therapist put me on some pretty strong sleeping pills. I guess I must've been in pretty bad shape after that, because people stopped treating my description as fantasy. My parents filed a police report, convinced some sicko had broken into my room. They arrested a guy, some creep who'd been spotted in the neighborhood, but I knew it wasn't him. I haven't seen

it since, but I think that can be attributed more to the sleeping pills than to it actually being gone.

I lay in my bed, staring at the ceiling. The TV had gone to static. I looked at the time: 1:45am. I exhaled. I forgot to take the pill. I was about to turn on the lamp when I noticed the open window. The curtains fluttered in the slight breeze. I never leave it open. I squinted at it, confused. I turned away, about to get out of bed when the floor creaked. I heard the soft thud of skin meeting floor. A low hiss came from the foot of my bed. I closed my eyes. "It's not real."