Figment
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    My room lay dark, silent, and unmoving. Although it seemed lifeless, I could almost feel it breathing, as if the darkness were alive. It consumed the walls of my bedroom, opening the room to the endless expanse of the unknown. I was wary of this, despite my attempts to focus on my work. The artificial glow of multiple computer screens only slightly illuminated the bed behind me, but in the shadows, I couldn't see much else. I turned back to my desk, picked up my pen, and continued scratching away at my drawing tablet, trying to pump out the next animated short, the one that would pay for my overdue rent and the cans of Red Bull that littered my messy desk. I rubbed my temples. Another long night.

    It was my third consecutive night without a wink of sleep, and needless to say, things began to happen. I often found myself face-down on my desk after a short blackout only to find it had been just a minute or two, and every now and then, I even saw little dark figures scuttling around just out of sight. I tried to ignore it and went back to work, trying to get that arm movement just right. I silently hoped my body would just shut down so I could get some rest, but I didn't have an excuse not to work, so I pushed on, my deadline in another three days. I knew I couldn't continue like this.

    I yawned, stretching my arms up over my head, and feeling my tensed muscles loosen was a far too relaxing feeling only urging my sleepiness on. My eyelids already felt too heavy to bear, and my hand felt cramped. I could nearly feel the heavy bags forming beneath my eyes. I finally finished the arm movement I had been slaving over for a couple of hours, but I hadn't reached the point that I wanted to in order to consider myself done for the night. I could only take solace in the fact the next part was only a couple of frames. I glared at it with a frustrated sigh, chugged another energy drink, and picked my pen back up. I'd only begun to draw the next frame when I thought I saw something out of the corner of my eye. I turned my head, but saw nothing in the dark. Even after my eyes adjusted, nothing was there. I brushed it off. I knew that it was probably the result of not having slept, like the other things I saw. I rubbed my eyes, turning my mind back to my work. I began to draw again, and as I finished the frame, I could suddenly feel the palpable, suffocating feeling of something standing directly behind me, far too close. I could feel the heat of breath on the back of my neck. My breath caught in my throat and I closed my eyes, knowing it wasn't real. I hoped, quietly, that the feeling would fade, waiting with my eyes squeezed shut for it to go away. I waited for a long, long time.

    When I woke up, the curtains were still open to reveal nothing but a sea of black, the alarm clock at my bedside displaying 3AM in bright red. I had fallen unconscious again. I groaned as I sat back up, rubbing the cheek that had been pressed to the surface of my desk for what felt like an eternity. I had only been out for five minutes. My computer screens glowed black, having gone into sleep mode, and I breathed a sigh of relief knowing that my work wasn't lost. Disoriented, I searched for my pen, which wasn't on my desk like I thought it would be. I felt for my phone in the mess, frustrated, and turned it on to function as a flashlight in the dark. I shone it over my desk to no avail and scanned the floor, where I found it lying beneath the desk close to the wall. I bent down, straining to reach it from where I sat. Once I had hold of it I sat back up. But once I did, I froze. The feeling was there again. Someone, or something, stood straight behind me, just inches away from me. I thought that it was just my brain playing tricks - I knew it was just my brain playing tricks. The feeling was horrible, sickening, and I felt like I couldn't breathe. I knew that there couldn't be anything there, because it was just a figment of my

exhausted mind. But something was there.

I could hear the silent but audible exhale of hot, stinking, ragged breath on the back of my neck. My chest felt incredibly tight as I shut my eyes again, willing it away. As I did, I felt its breath become deeper, more intent. I felt it raise a hand. I knew it was raising its hand even though I couldn't see it, but I couldn't move. I just kept my eyes shut and hoped. It slowly drew its hand nearer and nearer to my shoulder, my breathing increasing as I began to shake. I felt a cold sweat form on my brow. The anticipation was killing me, driving me insane. I could only feel the cold, hard pressure of a presence behind me. Not being able to see what it was that was doing this to me was maddening, but I couldn't bear the thought of moving, never mind opening my eyes. The pressure increased more and more until I felt its hand mere centimeters from touching my shoulder. It felt like someone was pushing tons of weight against my back. I could barely breathe, my lungs feeling heavy and full, as though they had turned to lead. I felt my mind begin to snap. I couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't take the anticipation. I knew it was going to happen, and I could feel it about to happen, but it wasn't happening. I couldn't take it. Finally, my eyes flew open, and I whipped around to face whatever was there. But there was nothing. It was just a figment of my imagination after all.

The pressure lifted almost immediately, and I stared helplessly into the darkness of my bedroom, sweating and breathing heavily. I didn't know what to do with myself anymore. I just laughed. I laughed so loud, I thought I might wake up people in the neighboring apartments. I wasted no time in standing up and getting into bed, leaving everything behind, forgetting the project. I was so tired my body welcomed the notion of sleep, and I quickly began to slip away into unconsciousness. But as my vision blurred and I fell into a long-awaited period of nothingness, I saw something move in the darkest corner of my room. It was only a small, barely noticeable shift, but I saw something take a small step towards me. I only caught a small glimpse of it, but it was tall, dark, and very large. As it stepped towards me from the shadows, everything turned to black.