The Intruder

 I was conscious. But that was the only thing I was conscious of.

 That, and the fact that I was absolutely certain I wasn’t alone in my room.

 And although my brain was active, my body was not. I expended the greatest mental strength I was capable of in an attempt to free my body from its state of deadness, of being frozen in fear as the rest of me was, but to no avail. I was paralyzed, as I was ten years ago after my first face-first trip down a flight of stairs. In the following years, I learned that bullies never quit, and that the first time was only as satisfying for them as the second. My current state of paralysis did little to ease the tension I felt with the memory of my past tormentors.

 *Go back to sleep, go back to sleep*, I pleaded with myself, for sleep was the state I had, somberly and ruefully, woken up from.Now I lied in a state of half-awareness.

 *But how odd*, I thought, of the fact that while my body remained frozen, my eyes, the seekers of the soul, were capable of movement; but I knew if that if I opened them, only a force fully sinister would greet me.

 Trepidation and terror gripped me, as if to consume my entire being, heart and soul, as I sensed a nightmarish malevolence emanating from the open door to my bedroom. I knew, as a bug trapped in a spider’s web knew of its fatal fate, that there was an intruder, an unwelcomed visitor, in my room. And that whoever, or whatever, it was, its intentions were no less than hellish. I reprimanded myself for not closing the door last night, for allowing myself to be such easy prey.

 Uneasily, I opened one eye, then the other. I stared into the never-ending darkness. I was not able to see the door, nor the predator that would surely accompany the sight of my only escape. My peripheral vision extended only to the window on my right, through which no light shone, as the blackness of the starless night seemed to seep into my room.

 Squeezing my eyes shut, I felt like a six-year-old, hoping against hope that under my covers I was safe, that no monster could breach the protection offered by my blanket.

I was at my most vulnerable, both physically and mentally.

 *Ka-thump.*

What was that?

 *Ka-THUMP. Ka-THUMP*.

 It was coming closer, I could feel it, I could hear it. Those must’ve been its footsteps.

 *KA-THUMP. KA-THUMP. KA-THUMP.*

 It was coming to get me. I knew that if it ever reached me, nothing could save me, heaven and hell be damned.

 The louder the noise, the greater my terror, the greater the noise, the louder my terror. I almost wanted it to reach me faster so the never-ending cycle could end.

 I opened my eyes again, and what beheld my sight was nothing I would ever forget, not even three years later, when I can still retell of how the sight made me believe in the Devil.

 *Caw, caw,* sounded somewhere outside my window, surely a cackle from the Devil’s advocate.

 The deathly cry was drowned out by a roaring in my ear as I was struck with panic and fear at what I saw.

 Upon my chest sat a figure, hooded in darkness. It seemed to glow with a brighter darkness than the rest of the room, as it sucked the life out of the heavy air. It fed off of the surrounding darkness, its silhouette distinguishable even in the light-deprived room. As demonic as its silhouette appeared, I could not describe how it looked. It seemed capable of shape-shifting, taking on one devilish form before transforming into an even more wicked one, all the while managing to maintain a humanoid appearance.

 It loomed over me, as if gloating. It radiated an oppressive force, one that felt similar to the time eight years ago, when my parents attempted to control every part of me, attempted to sculpt me into no more than a fractured mirror, a reflection of what they wanted me to be. The reminder made me feel even more helpless and weak.

 *Oh god*, I started, with a realization as terrifying as the creature on top of me, *it’s trying to suffocate me.*

 It weighed down on me, getting heavier every second, until I found myself wanting to gasp for breath. Wanting, but not being able to, for my body remained immobile, while the creature on my chest seemed to push down harder.

 I couldn’t breathe. *I can’t* – I couldn’t breathe.

 *Oh god*, I couldn’t breathe.

 *Breathe! Take a deep breath!*

 *I can’t! I can’t, can’t, can’t breathe.*

 I closed my eyes, refusing to give in. I wouldn’t allow it to win.

 As I tried to steady my breathing, I felt hands closing around my throat, squeezing.

*It’s trying to steal my breath!*

I felt more limbs grabbing at my own, pulling at me as if trying to entice me, to follow it into the darkness.

I opened my eyes once again, seeing nothing, but being unable to deny the fact that I could feel something pulling me, phantom hands roaming my body. It felt too real for this to be mistaken for a nightmarish dream. And it couldn't be a hallucination, for I could feel it, so frighteningly real; the demonic spirit in the room could not have been recreated by even the most fantastical of imaginations.

I had never been more intimate with mortality as I was then and there. Fear of death was never an emotion I was familiar with, because like every mentally rational person in their twenties, I believed Death would be dead before I came knocking on its door.

I squeezed my eyes shut. I fought as hard as I could, expelling all my mental strength, the tiny rational part of me that wasn’t overtaken with dread. The more I fought against it, however, the less I was able to defend myself. The harder I fought, the less I was able to breathe, and the larger the demon on my chest grew. I was hopeless, as I was five years ago, when I wished for hypothermia to take hold of my frozen soul after a failed attempt. Now, lying defenseless, I almost wished I had succeeded that day, if only to never have to endure what I was experiencing now.

The crow’s caws sounded louder, with a more maniacal tone, outside the window.

 Opening my eyes moments later, signaling my defeat, for all fight had left me, I realized: *The light of dawn!*

 For indeed, the sun outside had begun its painfully slow crawl up the sky, as if it was battling its own demons. The still and heavy panic in my system was slowly overtaken by relief, as I believed in the goldenness of the celestial sphere, that it would end all nightly torments. It was during the day, I believed, when evil spirits were kept at bay, plotting their next midnight visitations.

 A sliver of red light from the sun shone through the window, gracing me with its radiance. I began to calm down, my heart slowing, the weight on my chest lifting, the grip around my neck losing its strength.

 I blinked.

 Looking around, I found my room empty, all traces of the intruder in the dark having vanished. I felt my senses returning to me, surging inside me to remind me of what I had lost in the night.

 I wiggled my pinky, then my toes, and slowly the freedom of movement blossomed throughout my being, dousing me with the bliss of mobility. As my entire body unfroze, I saw outside the window a dark creature fleeing, flying away with a familiar *caw*.

 I was still burdened with the surrealism of last night that it took much pacing around the room and much limb-shaking before I felt cleansed, having been washed of the lingering fear.

 It was then that I noticed the door, the exit of this chamber of nightmares – the door, the *door*, the *closed door*.

 It appeared that I was wrong, that I had indeed closed the door last night, but…

 *How was a closed door able to allow entry for an intruder in the night?*

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 I have since dictated the events, of which I have just transcribed for you, for the analysis of an expert, one who specializes in the surreal and supernatural. The expert has since disappointed me numerous times, constantly denying my proposal of having been delivered an omen. This expert claims that the events of that fateful night could only be attributed to a natural phenomenon given the term “sleep paralysis”. It is not beyond reason or logic for my disbelief in such a disquieting explanation. How else could it be explained that every shadow cast by every person I cross paths with looks just like the demonic figure that once sat on my chest? Or that I am no longer haunted by dreams, but only by nightmares?

 No shadow of doubt exists in my mind as to the true occurrences of that night – that that was the night the Devil chose me.

Word Count: 1545