

## **A Waking Nightmare**

The room was colder than usual, despite the heavy comforter draped over Mia's lanky body. An unfamiliar humming sound permeated the air and an uncomfortable sensation pulsed through her arm. Her fingers twitched slightly as she opened her eyes to make sense of the situation. A man she had never seen before sat beside her bed. He wore a faded grey suit with an orange tie. He was flicking a syringe and humming a strange tune when he noticed she was awake.

He smiled warmly at her but something about the gleam in his grey eyes sent gooseprickles down her flesh. Her arm shook lightly as she made to move but a familiar resistance greeted her. *Sleep paralysis*. She fought to roll over but it felt like moving dead weight and she only succeeded in flinching ever so slightly. More annoyed than frightened she turned her attention back to the man. This wasn't her first encounter with sleep paralysis, but she never hallucinated a man before.

There had been the giant spider that spanned six feet across and stood in the corner of her room, staring at her with eight red gleaming eyes. She had been bitten once as a child and her hand swelled to three times its size. Ever since then she had been weary of spiders and their venomous pincers. This particular spider would slowly creep across her ceiling, once getting so close that she saw her motionless body reflected back at her through the eight red bulbous eyes.

Then there was the elongated shadow figure that hung in her closet. It would constantly change its shape, morphing into the clothing and miscellaneous items that

cluttered her closet. Her diary was in there, which made it difficult to dig out when she wanted to write. There were times when she swore the figure would materialize out of the shadows, even outside her paralysis spell, but when she did a double take, it would always turn out to be some crumpled sweater or misshapen boot. She once moved her diary to her bedside drawer, but the next morning she woke up, the shadow figure had been hovering right next to her. In her frozen wakefulness, all she could do was stare as the thing reached for her drawer to open it. Its fingers stretched long and flat on the handle, like a shadow wrestling with its intangible nature, but the drawer shook all the same. When she recovered from that particular episode, she immediately moved the diary back to her closet.

More often than not though she hallucinated a child at the side of her bed with open sores weeping from her face. The kid shared a likeness to the one she used to babysit as a teen. She was fired when she left the little girl alone in the kitchen for no more than five minutes and in that time, the girl had managed to drop a knife on her hand, cutting off her fingers. The child by her bedside also had missing fingers, all except her thumb, which would be popped in her mouth in an innocent childlike way. But when she pulled her thumb out the skin would be torn to pieces and she would smile, blood staining her rotten teeth. The child's gaze would shift from Mia's eyes to her fingers and then back again, all the while flashing her red, rotten teeth in a hungry grin.

This man however looked perfectly normal compared to her other hallucinations. Though something about his demeanor was unsettling. The tune he was humming was off key and he winked at her whenever they made eye contact. The syringe he was

fiddling with before seemed to be ready and he lowered it to her arm. To her surprise and horror, an IV was already attached and ready for access. Her heart fluttered as he injected an unknown substance into her and she felt warmth crawl up her veins. That was new. She had never *felt* anything before in her paralysis spells. This hallucination was by far the most elaborate she had ever experienced.

Her body shook more fervently as she attempted to move, but the paralysis would not break. The man pulled the needle out and opened a suite case next to him. Various utensils that looked like they came straight out of the dark ages littered his case. The most notable being a large bone saw that shimmered as if it was freshly polished. He gently placed the syringe back in its appropriate pocket and then reached for the bone saw. A whimper escaped Mia's lips as the man admired his gruesome tool. He glanced back at her almost as if he had forgotten she was there and then winked as he broke into that hearty smile. He lowered the saw and the icy metal stung as it reached her shin. She moaned louder as he prepared himself for the endeavor but before he could begin his grisly grind, a loud thud echoed through the apartment. He paused with the saw hovering over her and waited for another sound.

"Mia? You home?" A voice called out. Mia recognized her roommate's voice and her heart gave another flutter, from fear or relief she couldn't say.

The man looked back at Mia and lifted one finger to his lips as if to quiet her. Entranced by his presence, she couldn't make another sound. He lifted the saw and put it carefully back into its pocket. He gingerly removed the IV with practiced fingers and hastily put it back with the rest of his tools. As he closed his case he winked at Mia and

made for the window. All at once, her bedroom door swung open, her window slid shut, and she crashed into her nightstand as she conquered her paralysis.

“There you are, where have you been? It’s ten thirty. And what was that noise?”

Mia ignored her roommate and rushed to the window. Outside a figure in grey was walking toward the street. She strained to catch a glimpse of that bright orange tie but he had too quickly disappeared around the corner and out of sight. Mia’s roommate came up behind her and peered over her shoulder to get a look.

“What’re you looking at?”

Mia yanked her pajama sleeve up her arm to find the puncture point for the IV, but her arm was smooth and unharmed. She checked her other arm too to be sure, but there were no tiny red dots or bruises on either arm.

Mia swallowed past the lump in her throat and answered “A waking nightmare.”