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Weekly Free Write

As a young teen, on one of those long meanderings around the dark side of YouTube at 2am, I remember once finding a “scary story” about sleep paralysis. Basically, this person had woken up in the middle of the night only to find they weren’t able to move, and that some strange demonic figure started choking them or harming them in some way. That night I didn’t sleep much out of paranoia, and years later, my shower thoughts would sometimes include being grateful for never having experienced sleep paralysis.

However, during the Spring of 2020, while the world’s sleep schedule was more out of whack than a pubescent boy’s hormones, I found myself sleeping very few hours and with complete lack of consistency myself. So one day, after having stayed up all night and planning to take a little nap at around noon, I wake up to some strange yet somehow not terrifying feeling. Before opening my eyes, I felt a soft and big object against my neck, so I partially open my eyes and somehow see, in the absolute darkness of my windowless room, a completely stark black figure, which looked exactly like a person in one of those green screen suits they tend to use on movie sets, only black. This figure was holding, of all things, a gigantic 3 foot cotton swab to my neck, as if jokingly yet menacingly taunting me.

My still asleep mind was somehow instantly convinced of the least logical explanation: it was my roommate, Jason, who despite us not yet reaching the “randomly creep into my room with a big cotton swab on my neck” part of our roommate relationship, he was obviously playing a prank on me after purchasing a blacked out suit and a gigantic cotton swab.

My reactive plan was to keep my eyes from opening entirely and acting asleep, while I watched this figure continue to menace me with their terrifyingly lethal weapon, then I could suddenly smack his

face with my left arm screaming, something like a “gotchu!” surprising whom I obliviously thought was my roommate. So I attempted to enact my plan, but I quickly found that I couldn’t move. My movement was being impeded by some strange lack of energy, not an invisible force. The best analogy that I can find is when one is running in a dream and tries to run faster but is for some reason too weak to run and struggling to control one’s movements. It is a very similar feeling.

After a few seconds of attempting to move and looking at the dark figure, I see that it becomes aware of my awakesness despite my effort to keep my eyes half closed, and begins to weirdly smile. I was still absolutely convinced that it was Jason, much like Little Red Riding hood illogically believed the wolf was her grandmother despite its big eyes and sharp teeth: I somehow didn’t derive that stark black cloth can’t magically morph into a smile like the face from Spider-Man’s Venom.

The more effort I put in trying to move, the more the figure “smiled,” as I began to panick and I managed to slowly escape from my inability to move, until suddenly I regained all my energy and by inertia threw my left arm toward the figure who was now pressing the cotton swab annoyingly tight against my neck. Instead of hitting the figure, I hit an empty water bottle on my nighttable, and the figure disappeared into thin air, along with the pressure on my neck and my obliviousness of the situation. The water bottle hitting the ground woke me up completely, although I was already quite conscious, but a dumb sort of conscious.

I started to ask myself where Jason had gone, and that second I felt a terrifying chill throughout my body as I realized the senselessness of thinking it was Jason, so I left my room with a very concerned expression believing there was some sort of intruder in the house, to which I found a locked bedroom door.

Most dreams you can differentiate from reality. You don’t physically feel objects or are aware of time or just simple concepts and logic the way you are in the waking world. But this was completely different, I truly felt an object of my neck, and I truly saw a terrifying figure in front of me with a smile drawn on its cloth face. It was a terrifying lucid nightmare seamlessly mixed with reality.

I immediately understood I had just experienced sleep paralysis as I had previously heard about on YouTube and read about online, so I decided to make myself some coffee and work myself until I didn't have to lay in bed for more than a second to fall asleep for more than 12 hours.