

What Dreams May Come

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Do you ever miss someone that you've never even met? I do. Often.

It started when I was a kid, I guess. I'd be sitting in my room, minding my business, when all of the sudden an overwhelming longing would come over me, though at the time, I had no idea what the longing was for. All I knew is I wanted *something*. Sometimes I think the yearning is for people I see in my dreams. But that doesn't help me any – the people in my dreams never have faces. Their personalities and appearances are always so vivid except for this minor detail. More and more now, it's a single figure who visits me, his face always obscured, his body naked.

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I was a lonely kid, and not much has changed in my adulthood. Yeah, I've got friends, but most of the time it's easier to just be on my own. I don't know, maybe it's because I'm the only one who's still single. But it's not just that – I'm the only one who's still never *not* been single. Everyone I know has someone to care for, and who cares for them. Not me. I act like it doesn't bother me, but it does. I'm a walking, pathetic lie.

My roommate and I recently went on a trip to New York. It was spring break. He wanted to go home to visit his boyfriend and he generously invited me and three other friends along, none of whom had ever seen the city. What better place to see it from than a double sized apartment in the Upper East Side? John and Olivia were a couple who had recently gotten engaged. The third friend, Sara, had just started a relationship with a boy from her chemistry lecture; she could hardly be pulled away from her iPhone for the duration of the trip. I was glad to be seeing a city I'd always wanted to visit, but I couldn't help but feel all alone amongst the skyscrapers when everyone around me was holding hands and calling each other awful nicknames like "babe" and "cutie." I slept alone after the first night of the trip.

I had been nursing a bad head cold a few days before we hit the road, so my sinuses were a little clogged and breathing at night was particularly difficult. Sara and I were supposed to share a room, but I woke up the next morning, she was missing. At breakfast, I asked her what had happened.

"You were snoring like a caveman," she said bluntly, with a little bit of a giggle.

"Ah, sorry," I said. "I'm still getting over this cold."

My roommate, Al, chimed in. "Uh, I hate to break it to you buddy, but you *always* snore. I just don't say anything because I usually wear earplugs."

"Seriously?"

"Sara made me come in and check it out. It was pretty bad," Olivia said. John sat in the corner and nodded, sipping his coffee without bothering to look up.

"I'm just gonna sleep in the living room," Sara said. I tried to offer her the room and take the couch, but she politely refused as she texted away on her phone. While having my own room was nice, it certainly didn't help me feel any less alone. Nine days later, the trip was over, and we were on the road again, with me in the

back seat, alone and packed in with the luggage like a stuffed animal at the bottom of a crane machine game. I slept and wrote in my journal the entire trip home.

I've never known myself to be a snorer, and I was a little skeptical of my friends' accusations. Having fully recovered from my illness, I devised a plan: I was going to record myself sleeping. Thankfully, my computer came equipped with a microphone, albeit a shitty one. I found some free recording software on the Internet, downloaded it, and was ready to go. To be sure I would get the most accurate results, I had to find a time when Al wouldn't be around the apartment, and especially in the bedroom.

I should explain: the apartment Al and I share is a piece of shit, rundown hallway that boasts a tiny kitchen; a living room with a pair of couches, both encrusted with cat fur (we don't own cats); a bathroom you can barely move around enough to pee in; and a single, cramped bedroom that has to accommodate both our beds and all of our belongings. It's a nightmare, and the lack of privacy is often unbearable. But it's cheap, and I'm as poor as a middle class white kid from the suburbs can be, so I live with it.

As luck would have it, Al was planning on going back to New York again, just a few short weeks after spring break, once again to see his boyfriend. They hadn't even been dating a year, but they were serious enough to somehow justify the ten-hour drive across the mountains of western Pennsylvania and the monotony of Ohio. Al would be gone for the weekend, starting Friday evening and returning early Monday morning. It was sweet, and I envied every bit of it. I didn't envy Al for his boyfriend, or his boyfriend for Al; I envied what they had, together. Somehow, living with another gay kid, one who had a relationship, made my seemingly endless loneliness all the more real.

At least I had other things to worry about. I had friends to prove wrong. That Friday night, I set my laptop on the nightstand that separated our beds and plugged the charger in to the wall, so I could record the entire night's activity. Al's absence not only afforded me the opportunity to gather evidence to bolster my "I don't snore" theory, but also allowed me to do something a little more private. Being that I'm on my lonesome, and that I'm forced to share a room with another person who sleeps a mere two feet from me, I don't often have the opportunity to relieve myself of a certain kind of physical tension one experiences and often turns to in moments of sexual desperation. I resorted to the Internet in search of a visual stimulant.

After a few minutes of browsing, I found a video suited to my desire: it was of a pair of men, one much taller and heavier than the other, with a salt and pepper beard. The video appeared to be from a series this particular production company made that focused on real couples, and you could totally tell from watching. The way the two interacted was loving and tender. It was incredible; I only made it half way through the video. The deed was done, and I felt lonelier than ever, having derived some sort of disgusting pleasure from watching their escapades. I closed the Internet, turned on the sound recording program, cursed myself for being so pathetic, and promptly fell asleep.

I met the faceless man again in my dreams that night. He has a habit of never speaking, at least with his voice. In the dream, he opened the door to my apartment and slowly crawled along to the bedroom, where he found me laying under my

covers, waiting for him. He said nothing as his naked, perfect body moved slowly towards my bed. He climbed over my comforter, coming ever nearer towards me. I was just about to make out the shape of his face, when a disturbing hissing sound arrested my attention.

The dream ended abruptly, and I found myself staring at the wall in the darkness of the early morning. The covers had made their way over my head, and my pillows were on top of my face, like a helmet. It took a moment, but I noticed a faint, consistent noise. It sounded like a wet gurgling, intermixed with the occasional sharp hiss or paralyzing moan. It grew louder in volume, like it was approaching. I stayed in my bed, petrified of what was lurking over me, with only a blanket and a few pillows between us. Whatever godforsaken thing had slipped in to my apartment released one final, terrifying gurgle. I threw up the covers, ready to attack. Nothing was there. In front of me was the old steam heater our good-for-nothing landlord had installed in our unit. I forgot it occasionally made terrifying noises that sound like the bastard child of a banshee and a drunken blowjob.

Fuck! My recording! I had forgotten all about it! What if the sounds of the heater completely drowned out the noises I might have been making in the night? I scrambled over to my computer to check out the situation. The computer had recorded about four hours worth of audio and conveniently displayed all of the wave fluctuations or whatever the hell they're called in a little visual rendering. Obviously, I wasn't going to listen to four hours of audio; I decided to investigate only the parts that had little "spikes" in the display. For the most part, the recording was consistent throughout the duration of my sleep; only a few small, isolated sections were of any interest. But, the sound was fuzzy; it was impossible to tell if the noise was me, the heater, or a failure of my recording equipment. So much for that, I thought. The heater gargled and screamed again, and I cursed at it before falling unconscious for the better part of a weekend.

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I was unsatisfied with the results of my experiment. I knew it was dumb, but I wanted to be right about this, since I hadn't been right about very much lately: I was failing classes and had just gotten a final warning from work for showing up late so often. This could be my one, insignificant shot at redemption, and I was going to take it. I made a plan. Al was going to a concert downtown on Friday night. That would be my chance to prove myself again. When Al left, I would turn down off the heaters, middle of the winter be damned. I wasn't about to let the cheap old things cheat me out of exoneration again.

When Al left, I checked all three heaters in the apartment and made certain they wouldn't make a single hiss. I grabbed a few extra blankets from the closet and threw on a sweatshirt for good measure. The ordeal proceeded in much the same way as before: porn, masturbation, shame, sleep. The video was from the same series as before, but featured a different couple, neither of whom was at all attractive. But it wasn't the bodies I was drawn to in the first place. Porn is disgusting, and so are those that consume it. This was porn, but also something so much worse, and I was the one seeking it out. I drifted in to my nap as easily as tying my shoes, hating myself, and wishing someone would save me.

Again I dreamt the faceless figure was with me, only this time he didn't come through the door. The dream started with him right in the bedroom. He came over to the side of my bed and stood over me. I wanted to reach out, to touch him, call him to me. I had missed him for so long. But, I was frozen; I couldn't get myself to move a muscle. His hand reached out over me, slowly. For some reason, I was terrified. The thing I had wanted for so long had finally come to me, and now here I was, trembling and unsure whether it was something I wanted after all.

I jolted awake in a cold sweat and sat up in bed, hunched over myself for nearly an hour. The dream had never been so real, and it definitely hadn't ever been so fearful. I sat there with my head in my hands, replaying the events and pondering what they could mean, alone in the darkness.

When I finally got up, I checked my recording. I'd only been asleep for an hour and a half. I scrolled through the audio and noticed a few significant spikes, particularly at the end of the recording. Because my nap was significantly shorter than the last one, I opted to listen to the entire audio track. After all, it was a Friday night and I had the rest of the weekend to be productive. I grabbed my headphones from atop a pile of junk that had amassed in the middle of the room and plugged them in to the laptop. I also grabbed a glass of water and a snack of tortilla chips and salsa from the kitchen. Finally settled, I began listening to what I hoped would be proof of my innocence.

The recording, for the most part, was a fuzzy silence, punctuated only briefly by the occasional, muffled vroom of passing cars on the street. There were also a few indiscriminate noises which may have been construed as snoring, but none of which were ever sustained long enough to indict me as a "snorer." The room had become almost unbearably cold. I threw on a hooded jacket and put on an extra pair of socks to counteract the chill. The heaters were too far away and turning them back on simply would have required too much effort. Occasionally, the lights flickered a little and I would bang on the wall and curse my landlord for being such an opportunistic shithhead.

Near the end of the recording was a span of about three minutes that caught my attention. It started softly – so soft that I nearly missed it. At first, it sounded like a low rumbling, but over a minute, it grew in volume and turned in to more of a gurgling. Kind of like the heater. But, the heaters were off. I paused the recording and double-checked to make sure I hadn't failed to shut the valves on each of the three devices all the way. Nope. Everything was just as it was supposed to be. I turned the heaters on and went back to the recording, wondering what could have made the noise. I put my headphones back on and resumed listening. The recording had risen in volume significantly and suddenly. I had to take my headphones off. I turned the volume down on my laptop, and was surprised to find it hadn't been very high in the first place. The gurgling had turned in to a violent banging and scraping. Almost like something clawing against metal.

The room darkened as the sun went down and seemed to be getting colder. I paused the recording again and got up to make a cup of tea. When I drew the water from the faucet, a little bit got on my hand and fingers. It was so cold it burned, and I recoiled from the sink. For the first time since I'd moved in to the apartment, I wished the heaters were moaning their horrible dirge. I filled the teapot with the

more than frigid water and turned on the old gas stove. I looked forward to the warmth of the flame and was disappointed when the burner wouldn't turn up any higher than a tiny, pale blue flicker. I tried the back left burner, but was met with the same response. And then the back right. And then the front right. None of the burners would turn on higher than the very minimum. Just another issue to bring up with the maintenance staff. The place really was a shithole. I poured a mug of water from the pot and heated it in the microwave. It was lukewarm, but that's how microwave tea always is.

The final minute or so of the recording went by without any oddities of note. I was about to close my computer when a horrible, high pitched wailing surrounded me. It was a terrifying, smooth shrieking that fluctuated in pitch and tone. I spilled my tea in my lap. Now I was grateful the water was microwaved, and poorly at that. I opened my computer to make sure I hadn't upset it, but nothing was wrong; it had already entered sleep mode. I checked the heaters again to make sure steam wasn't escaping through a valve that wasn't open enough, which would make a whistling sound. Nothing was wrong. And the strange part was, no matter where I went in the apartment, the volume remained the same. The fire alarm wasn't going off, and the sound was too loud to be neighbors' music blaring through the tissue paper walls. I was standing in the middle of the living, a little frightened, when Al came in.

"Holy shit, have you seen what's going on outside?" he asked. He didn't notice I was shaking, and seemed to be oblivious to the noise. His presence sobered me a little.

"No. I've been napping. What's up?"

"A *huge* piece of the siding on the building came flying off the in the wind and dragged across the parking lot. It totally fucked up a bunch of cars. It even killed a guy." I must have looked confused or upset. He paused for a moment, waiting for a reaction, but when he was met with none, he continued the story. "Yeah, he was just sitting in his car, getting ready to leave, when it tore off the side of the house and went flying in to his windshield and ripped the roof off. Cut everything above the shoulders off. Didn't you hear the sirens?" Is that what I was hearing? Sirens? I wasn't convinced. No siren I'd ever heard sounded like what I experienced in the apartment that night. But I played along.

"Oh, yeah. Yeah, I heard 'em. That's what woke me up. I was a little freaked out by 'em."

"Yeah, you looked kind of pale when I came in."

"It was just the sirens. How was the show?" He said it was good and suggested I lie down and rest a little. Sleep was the last thing on my mind. I didn't give a shit about snoring anymore, I knew for a fact what I heard couldn't have been the sirens.

The next day, I went to the mall to buy the highest quality microphone I could afford. I got a surprisingly decent model a measly twenty dollars. On my way back home, I stopped at a hardware store and picked up a few items essential for improvised soundproofing: a large sheet of green foam to cover the window and a roll of duct tape to keep it in place. I pulled in to my parking lot and left the materials in the car to avoid rousing my Al's suspicions that something may be amiss; I didn't want him to think I was crazy, after all. He was home, making

arrangements for the next weekend. It was his boyfriend's birthday, and he was going to come here instead of having Al make the drive out to New York for the third time in the last month. They had decided to rent a room at a nearby hotel to spend an evening celebrating together. I would have been jealous, but instead I looked forward to having yet another window of time to prove to myself what needed to be proved.

The week passed slowly and when it was finally over, I bid Al farewell and wished him a good time. I waited about twenty minutes or so before I finally went down to the car to fetch all the materials I'd bought. I turned off the heaters off again before taping the foam sheet up in the window. I locked the door and turned off anything that would have made the slightest beeping other than the computer. I was determined to get an accurate recording of what was going on in my apartment, if anything was happening at all. If my recording came up blank, then I knew I should be worried.

Once again, I found myself in the midst of a shameful act before my experimental sleep. The Internet makes it far too easy to be a shitty person. I laid on my pillows, curled in a ball, and prayed that I wasn't crazy. Perhaps I'd see the mystery man in my dreams again. I fell asleep, imagining how beautiful his face must be.

I awoke to the sounds of a faint scratching. I refused to move from my bed and tried to go back to sleep, but was perplexed by what could be causing the sound. I looked at my laptop. Nothing was recording – the sound was too faint to be picked up by even this new, much improved microphone. I decided it must be a byproduct of my drowsiness and continued to lay motionless. And that's when I heard it. The unmistakable click of the door's deadbolt. Al wasn't supposed to be home all weekend. I imagined what he possibly could have forgotten, when the creaking of the door opening caught my attention. I chained the door when I locked it; there was no possible way Al could have gotten in without my assistance. I froze in my bed.

The gurgling started again. The room became cold, and I swear I could see frost forming on the dirty, graying walls. My mind reeled with who—or what—could have had the ingenuity to open a door and its chain. I looked around my bed and picked up the most menacing makeshift weapon I could find: a screwdriver I had used to fix a loose door hinge earlier in the week. I got up and crept along the floor, careful not to make noise. If I was dealing with some sort of thief or violent intruder, I was going to need the advantage of surprise. I turned the corner of the hall. What I saw rendered me immobile. I dropped my screwdriver, in capable of tensing the muscles in my hand.

There he was, the man from my dreams, naked and crouching in the doorway. He began crawling towards me on his knuckles and the balls of his feet, slowly. Inching forward, the weight of his presence grew and filled the air with a palpable gloom. As he approached, the lights seemed to dim, and the room grew cold. His head was down, staring at the carpet, but he was clearly making his way toward me. Even though his face was hidden, I could tell something wasn't right. Most men don't have the frayed, bloody ears of a rabbit poking out of the tops of their heads. I stood frozen in fear. He paused feet in front of me, eyes still transfixed

on the ground. He sat there, crouched for far too long. I couldn't handle myself anymore. I had to speak.

"Who are you?" I questioned. His left ear twitched. Slowly, deliberately, he brought himself to his feet, first straightening out his legs and his torso before pulling his shoulders out of their hunch and aligning the rest of his body, head and neck still bent down. He didn't answer. I'm not sure I would have noticed if he had. I was distracted by the lower half of his body. In the midst of his flawlessly sculpted form was an enormous, decaying cock, covered in all manner of rot and infestation. It rested midway down his legs, dead and lifeless except for the maggots that fed on it. I wanted to cry, to scream, to vomit.

One by one, his steps brought him closer to me. When he passed any kind of light, it immediately went out with an explosive flash, leaving a menacing darkness that seemed to be deepened by my fear. Deliberately, he came closer. Then the stench hit me. It was foul with decay; I'm not sure death has a scent, but if it does, this must be what it smells like: week's worth of fermenting garbage tinted with evil. He was right in front of me now. I fell to my knees and puked on the carpet.

Coughing and with my hand over my mouth, I looked up. He wasn't faceless anymore. Atop his perfectly shaped body and impeccable skin sat the deformed, amalgamated visage of a human skull and a rabbit's face. It was grey with rot, and skin was falling off around the cheekbones, under the eyes, and from the chin. Entire patches of his face were missing so you could see his molars even when his mouth wasn't opened; it made him look like he was smiling a terrible, sadistic smile. Where his eyes should have been, there were huge gray orbs, consistent in color and iridescence throughout. They stared. And stared. And stared. He grabbed me by the chin and pulled me up close to his face and kissed me, slowly, with tears running down my cheeks. His half dead tongue penetrated my lips as the last of the lights in the apartment went out.

It's been five years since that night. I dropped out of school and moved away almost immediately. I live alone now—no one will stay with me, not for longer than a day or two anyway. Even my parents hesitate to visit, even though I wish they would; nothing ever happens in the presence of others. He hasn't visited me since that night, but he's still around. I can see him in little anomalies in my life: the walls will have a thin layer of frosty sheen on them when I get home in the middle of summer; light bulbs will occasionally burst; the tv always seems to play something about rabbits, no matter what channel I watch. I tried getting a pet, a little corgi I named Buster. He died two weeks after I brought him home from the breeders. The vets couldn't even begin to tell me what went wrong. "Sometimes these things just happen," he said. But I knew better. I tried goldfish after that, without any luck. No matter what I did, the water would always get too cold. I can't even keep a plant for longer than a day without it withering.

I don't daydream and long for the people from my dreams anymore. I'm glad to have their faces obscured. I try to sleep as little as I can anymore, trying to keep them away from me. But, they're in me somewhere. The rabbit-faced man is just one of the many I've seen. I'm hoping he's the only one I'll ever meet.

