

There was something downstairs that would not stop dripping.

I've never been a fan of going downstairs at night but, then again, who is? Like the cautious species human beings have evolved into, we tend to imagine pure horror when we're alone in the dark. It's as if something in our brain is trying to scare itself just for fun. I hadn't been able to fall asleep in weeks without the help of an altering substance. I had tried everything from NyQuil to Xanax, to inhaling Horehound from a glass pipe. Nothing did the trick until I'd done everything at the same time.

I imagine the hand of substance abuse softly pressing a finger to my lips, hushing away the insomnia like a parent does with a child who won't stop crying. But tonight I hadn't consumed any remedy because of a fright I gave myself the day before. I last remembered the clock being two minutes after midnight and waking up to four-twenty-seven the following afternoon. About fourteen and a half hours I'd been out cold. It seemed like that shushing finger on my lips had actually been a mean right-hook, knocking me to something more comatose than just a deep sleep. I spent the rest of that evening with a lump the size of a golf ball lodged in my throat, unable to swallow all those hours spent away from the world when I hadn't meant to. I thought tonight I would punish myself with sobriety; possibly the worst punishment imaginable for a broken-hearted insomniac.

And the dripping from downstairs wasn't helping.

*Oh, poor me. Just another thing I can't fix*

It is too easy to feel sorry for myself, sometimes. It's a default setting I'm ashamed of but not entirely sorry for. Something as simple as a missing cat poster will knock me off my self-loathing pedestal just as quickly as I got on it. I picture the owners of the cat, parents at an industrial-size copy machine in a Staples with their small child who they let choose the picture for the poster. I come to the probability that they are losing even

more sleep than I am. This realization reinforces the guilt and self-loathing process, and the cycle continues, like a kind of horror story in and of itself. I'm currently in that exact process as I write this, sick with a love gone wrong, so lost on different, crooked paths that we couldn't find it again.

I remained on my back with my head on the pillow as I turned my eyes towards the door at the right corner of the room. It was closed as usual, the bathrobes and towels hanging from their designated hooks. I had this recurring optical illusion that only seemed to happen at night where the towel draped over the robe looked like the back of a nun's habit. After my first night with her, I started taking both the towels and robes off the hooks and tossing them to the ground before getting into bed. Just another oddity to add to my nightly routine.

But tonight, she was there.

I was frozen solid with the kind of fear a jump-scare enforces. I knew the light switch would cure this sight, like it always did, but that meant getting out of bed to reach the damn thing. I'd have to push the covers off, swing one leg after the other over the edge of the bed, and let my feet dangle in the abyss. Then I would worry about things under the bed, starting with the silly cliches like monsters with fangs and claws, then maybe a pale hand with yellow fingernails reaching towards my ankle, eventually upgrading to the most frightening image of all; the face of another person. No blood, no fangs, no drool dripping from their chin with a cannibalistic thirst; just another human being's face looking back at mine in the dark. A face in a place it shouldn't be.

I still hadn't moved a muscle and I knew if I didn't try in the next five seconds, I would stay like that until the sun rose. I sat up halfway with my right elbow digging into the mattress, threw back the covers, swung my legs a good foot away from where the mattress ends and the floor begins, and placed my feet on the ground.

I did that much, I thought, the least I could do was now walk over to the light switch and make the nun go away. I flicked the switch with aggressive relief.

Except she didn't go away.

I stood there staring at the figure that was supposed to be gone but wasn't. Light usually takes away the shadows, turns distorted images of someone sitting on a chair into a mound of pillows. At least, that's what it's supposed to do. I swallowed dry spit hard and heard the "gulp" sound come from my throat as I stared at the back of the door, the nun's figure non-changing and even more apparent now. She did not turn around like I expected but somehow that made it worse. Like when a character in a movie says, "show your face," so they can view what they're up against. I could now see that her habit reached down to the floor and made a puddle of black fabric where her shoes should be.

And the puddle swayed just a little, just enough to show that someone was wearing it. I couldn't see arms or hands, just the back of the long black veil that I'd come to know so well in the middle of the night.

As if against my will, I drew a sharp breath that was louder than I expected which startled and caused me to draw in another loud gasp. It was the first time I had ever been reasonably terrified in my own bedroom. I couldn't truthfully say how long I stood there, like during all unnerving situations, it seemed like forever and a day.

And that's when she turned.

It was the human likeness that made the turning that much spookier, like a teacher at the front of a classroom turning to reveal a grimace on their face to the noisy students. The nun also had a face, something I never really considered before until I laid eyes upon it. No fangs, no blood, not even a discolored, decrepit hand. She didn't have hands or, if she did, the arms of the robe were long enough to cover them. Her hood turned towards my empty bed and then slowly towards the other side of the room where I stood, mortified and breathless. This was straight out of a nightmare and I hoped to God it was one. She was at least six feet tall, the same height as the hooks she hung on, but now she was moving towards me.

Then I realized it wasn't a "she" at all but multiple beings, all at once. The faces changed back and forth and it took me a second to realize they were faces I knew. In particular, they were faces of people I'd hurt, the first one being of my recent love-gone-wrong. The next was a childhood friend I parted ways with, then a boy who loved me at fifteen, my mother, a store clerk I was caught stealing from, my father, my ex-lover, again. Again and again and again these faces shifted, each with a look of familiarity and hurt, like a dog that's used to being hit. Their eyes changed colors, hairstyles morphed, their mouths opened and closed but never let out a sound. I think that's what scared me the most; the silence of it all, all that pain and nothing to say for it. I used to think it was loud noises that scare people the most and at the moment, they do. In the end, though, it's the silence of our loved ones we hear clearest. I realized that as they all stared at me. They wouldn't stop.

Before I finally let out a scream, I looked down to see my wrists were tepid with blood and that the dripping, which I assumed was from downstairs, was actually coming from me all along.

I remember now. I let the monster win, not the one under my bed but the one in my head; the worst one.

A split-second decision just before I crawled into bed, the ache was all I could feel, his face was all I could remember, and the future I saw without him was too real for me to bear. I thought back to my younger self and was reminded of how she knew she would die young. She was judging me for not doing it already, upset that I lied to her and had made it well into my twenties after all. I allowed myself to be consumed by a boy and he broke me in half. I'd had enough. I shouldn't have listened to her, I know that now, but it was too late.

I looked up at the nun and saw the little self I'd known all those years ago. I had hurt her too, now. Perhaps I thought that the only way to see the boy again was to wait behind his door, hanging from a hook. Perhaps I'll be his nun now.

