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My Demon

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My Demon

Asia Mclaughlin

12:33 a.m.

The lingering silence is broken by rustling.

“Who’s there...?”

“Shhh,” the voice whispers back.

“Who are you?” The dark figure peers over my bedframe.

Their eyes are dimly lit, trying to reach my inner thoughts. I brush my hair to the side, adjusting my eyes to the darkness and its creation. Lying on the chair, its long fingers rest under its chin; its four legs straddle the couch cushion.

Watching, listening.

“Please, go away.”

“No.”

“Please, I’m afraid of you.”

“I’m here because you need me.”

The figure swiftly removes itself from the chair. It glides towards the ceiling, then around the bed.

It lies down directly next to my face. Our eyes meet and I hold in my tears because I know it will enjoy the smell. It smiles, reaching one finger towards my face. A soft but raspy voice says, “You’ll always be alone. I’m the only one you have. I’m just stopping by for a visit.” I squeeze my eyes shut, trying not to move. It gives me a grin and slowly retreats from my bedside. As it moves towards the closet, it descends.

8:10 a.m.

The morning is foggy, but the birds are chirping outside. A cold breeze fills my nostrils as it brushes my cheeks. The cold cushions send goosebumps through my body. Turning the heat up all the way, I begin my drive. The forest roads fill my field of view. One...two...three... I count the cars that pass. I drown my endless thoughts into my songs. The trees turn into streetlights as I enter a more suburban area. As I reach to change the song, the lights go out. The cars...the people...the sound...all gone. The road in front of me is dark, except for my headlights. The houses surrounding me have no sign of life in them. At the end of the road, I see it.

Its dark body and long legs stand still. It seeks me out amongst the emptiness. I grip my phone and refuse to look away. I know what happens if I try to run. It moves towards me, faster than I've seen it move before. I grip my phone even harder, sweating, trying to contain my fear. As it approaches, it slides onto the hood. My car shakes, then settles. It stares at me through the windshield. I gather the courage to scream, "Move!" but it doesn't like my tone of voice. Moving to the top of my car, it starts shaking and rattling it. I begin to cry. I close my eyes and try to picture something else. Yet the shaking continues and it begins to yell at me.

"You'll never be anything!"

"You have no one!"

"No one will ever love you!"

"Why do you even try?"

A gush of wind shakes my car one last time. The lights come back on, and the cars continue to pass. It's gone...for now.

8:50 p.m.

"I have to get started on my paper," I mumble to myself. Rustling through my drawers, I find some sweatpants. I grab my laptop and try to brainstorm. "What if I wrote about my passion for art..." I think, looking down at my keyboard. "No, that's dumb," I say to myself again. "Oh! I could write about my love for animals." Glancing in the mirror, I lose my smile and scratch the idea. After endless hours of struggling to find a topic, I feel hopeless. The feeling of failure is the only thing on my mind. I try to play some music to lighten my mood but it makes it worse. The sad songs appear on shuffle and I dig myself a hole. Drifting away from writing my paper, I sit in my bed, alone and confused about the meaning of life. I ask myself, "Does anyone actually care about me?" as I check my phone.

No notifications

I sigh, closing my eyes.

Forgetting about my responsibilities, I get up for some water. I grab my tall, bright yellow Hydro Flask and walk to the kitchen. I hear the huge ice cubes clank as they fall into the cup. The water is clear and cold. I take a few gulps before I get a brain freeze. I head back to my room, walking through the silence. This is the routine: procrastination and late nights. I finally finish my paper, a bland feeling rushing through my veins. I close my laptop and plug it in. Rolling over into bed, I check my phone once more.

No notifications

Whatever. It's okay to be alone; that's what I am used to.

1:01 a.m.

A cold rush of air skims my face. I jolt awake, looking around. Sitting beside me, it is back. This time, I'm ready. Glaring directly into my soul it says, "Looks like you realized you actually are a failure," sneering at its mediocre joke. I sit up and swallow the stone in my throat. I am determined to settle this tonight. "I am so sick of you just showing up," I begin.

"Really? Then when will you realize you'll always be alone?"

"I'm not alone. I have friends who care about me," I argue.

"No, you don't."

"Yes, I do."

"No one will ever love you."

"I love myself."

"What is there to love?"

I process this. Proceeding with caution, I lift my head up and say, "You know what? You only show up to make me feel horrible about myself. You live under my skin and never let me be alone. My life is run by you, on your watch. I'm done with it. I am more than what you tell me I am. From now on, I pay no mind to you. You are nothing to me."

It stares at me, in shock, because I've never spoken those words before. Trying to force a word out, it begins to crumble from the head down, caving in on itself. I inch back in confusion. Watching as it turns to dust, I sit up and glance down. It's gone, this time for a while...a long time. I found it in myself to finally stand up to my demon. *It* was my fear, anxiety and most of all my depression.