

Fear

Casey Freeman

Fear is a loathsome thing. Or so you tell yourself. You like to think that you could take on the world without batting an eye. Your mind is an eccentric one—and the root of all your problems. It makes you erratically confident in your fantasies and the first to crumble in reality.

In that, you're afraid of the dark. You even told someone close to you, once. Not that it helped you get over it, like you hoped it would. Admission is the first step to recovery, or so they say. They're full of crap, you decided.

You recall that you were like this when you were a little girl, too; when Daddy caught you giving yourself a pep talk to walk the three feet across the hall from your room to the bathroom and, in his own form of kindness, would turn the hall light on and pat your head before returning to his own room to sleep. Or when you would watch your sister play certain games on the Super Nintendo where the cartoonish monsters had an air about them. An air that made your breath stop, and then wonder why you were so scared. They looked bizarre, so bizarre, but not like anything from horror movies. They simply had an air that made them just plain terrifying and sent you into a ball under her desk, despite it being daylight. (You finally played that same game, you admit proudly, though it took you around 15 years to do so). There are some things that kids don't grow out of, you suppose.

You would tell someone about your nightmares when you had them once, too. The nightmares where that someone died, the nightmares where you saw nothing but a bloody stage play, and the nightmares that make your breath hitch when you wake as you still feel a predatory stranger's vice grip on your wrist. You've since stopped, not wanting to be a burden to them anymore, though you still have them every so often. You think it's something you should face yourself, anyway.

Still, those popular schoolyard monsters that everyone knows aren't real make you cocoon under your blankets, afraid and ashamed. Staring into the abyss only nets you shapeless, shadowy figures conjured by your chaotic imagination and its conspirators, your eyes. So, you opt to screw your eyes shut, refusing to open them until morning. You think acknowledging the fact that your fear stems from irrationality will eradicate it. You think that because you have no night lights in your room and refuse to buy one, your fear isn't an actual fear at all.

It's then that you can see all the small glows around you. Your clock; your brightly-colored stuffed animals that remain firmly at your side as they have all these years, in their very specific order (which always, always has to be, from left to right, the mouse, the small bear, the Eevee Pokémon plush, the small Pikachu Pokémon beanie doll, the large Pikachu plush, and the stuffed Anne Marie from *The Aristocats* and if any of them are missing you will not go to sleep until it is found), despite your status as an adult, game systems that are simply in sleep mode versus being shut off entirely. Your cell phone remains on and charging all night, every night, and you know you've illuminated its screen many times

for no reason other than a momentary reprieve from the black. You have a lamp on your nightstand whose switch is located approximately six inches away from your pillow.

And even as you're typing this, you find yourself stilling your hand from creeping toward that switch when the music you're listening to takes a turn for the eerie. You won't look away from the computer screen because you don't want to meet your mental mirages of those shadowy figures, and you wish your cat would come snuggle like she always does, a welcome distraction from your illogic.

Maybe you're just lonely, you figure. You're just crying out for protection. You're not actually scared. With that, you begin the cycle anew. Fear is, after all, a loathsome thing.