

II.

The Nightmare

Salvador's stuff arrived at sunset, and the movers, some pretty well-built dudes, got his room set up in under an hour. I couldn't help but notice that his furniture all looked nicer than mine, so I wagered that he was from a more well-off family than me. I decided against asking about it; it wasn't my place to pry into his financial life on the first day. As soon as the moving company was gone, Salvador got up and bid me goodnight, saying he was going to go to bed early to recover from his fainting spell earlier. I told him that that was probably a good idea, and he disappeared into the little patch of darkness that occupied the hallway between our rooms.

I didn't go to bed until a few hours later, since it was still a day before classes started. Moonlight was streaming in through my blinds, casting a pale blue glow over all my belongings once I had turned off the lights. I stripped down to my underwear and slid into bed, wrapping myself up in the blankets like a burrito. I fell asleep pretty quickly, I think.

I didn't sleep much that night.

I dreamt I had awoke in my room, it looking exactly like it had the whole week I'd been there so far. Blue light from the moon filled the room. I could hear heavy feet padding across the carpet, my door creaked open. I wanted to ask if it was Salvador, but my voice caught in my throat and I couldn't make a sound. I sat up, just a little, my heartrate already picking up.

A four-legged figure, black as shadow, with two pale and ghostly blue eyes prowled at the foot of my bed. I watched it go, back and forth, and with every pace the room around me grew more dim, as though it were snuffing the light with its footfalls. The darkness deepened until I felt lost in a void, with only myself and a pair of ice blue eyes from some haunting apparition. I followed those eyes as they lifted up towards me, and I could feel my mattress bounce as the feral shadow leapt onto the bed.

It was oppressive in the way a hot and humid day is. It had no substance or weight, only a pressure, a force that pushed the back of my head into my pillow and froze my body beneath my thin sheets. I was trembling, and I felt it sink its fangs into my neck, in the soft spot just above my collar bone. Pain shot through my body, and I screamed, sitting up suddenly.

My eyes were wide and wild, my body trembling with terror and adrenaline. The moonlight seemed brighter now than when I had laid down, and the creaking of the old apartment was so much more obvious. I threw the sheets off and ran to the door to throw on the lights. The illumination would have brought a momentary calm, had I not heard Salvador scream from down the hallway. I tore open my door and grabbed the frame with one hand, using that as leverage to spin myself into the hallway at full speed. I only managed a couple steps before realizing that Salvador was right in front of me, his shocked face illuminated by the light pouring from my door. I couldn't stop in time, and crashed right into him.

I stumbled back, and Salvador fell right onto his rear with a grunt and a whine.

"Fuck!" I grabbed onto my doorframe to stop my backwards stumble. "What the fuck, are you okay?"

Salvador was rubbing his shoulder as he got back to his feet, trembling where he stood. "Yeah, I dunno. I mean, yes. I'm okay. I heard you screaming...?" he ventured timidly.

"I uh... I had a really bad nightmare." I stepped out of my doorway and back into the hall. "What about you? I was running to check on you, you were screaming too." I said as I rubbed the spot where I had been bitten in my dream.

"Yeah, I was. I just, uh..." Salvador glanced around before continuing, he was shaking with adrenaline. "I had a crazy dream too," he began, stammering every other word. "This four-legged shadow monster crawled into my room..."

I already didn't like where this was going, but I needed him to continue. "Anything else?" My question hung in the air.

"It got dark, too dark. Like I was blind. But I could feel it prowling, it jumped up on the bed." Salvador was looking more uncomfortable with every word. "It bit me! It bit me right in the shoulder, up by my neck! There was blood all over, it was hot and sticky and..." he shuddered and swallowed. "I know it didn't happen but... The spot is sore still."

I was suddenly aware that we were both massaging the same part of our bodies, and I promptly stopped. "Damn. That's the same nightmare I had." I stopped before mentioning I didn't bleed in mine, to spare him some distress. I looked back into my room, over my shoulder. I felt around the wall for the hall light switch and flipped it, giving us more light.

"Hearing that makes it way more uncomfortable." Salvador grimaced.

"It was just a dream. School starts in a day, it was probably some collective anxiety thing, I dunno." I really wanted to believe what I was saying, but I was pretty freaked out. Without a word I left Salvador standing in the hallway and flicked on the lights in the living room and kitchen as well, chasing out the night. He followed after me and stood in the entrance to the hall, simply watching me with his arms curled up to his chest.

"I hope it's not a bad omen," he piped up. "I'm still really tired though. I'm gonna take a quick shower, I can't shake the feeling that there's blood all over me." He paused. "Probably gonna sleep with the lights on too... I'm gonna get my towel." With that, he slipped back into his room and closed the door. I found myself scratching at the dream bite again, and flipped off the kitchen and living room lights before going to the bathroom.

I stroked over my fur, looking for any little bite or puncture or even a bruise, but there was nothing. That was reassuring enough for me to get back in bed, but I left my lights on that night as well. I laid in bed for quite a while, staring up at the ceiling, going over the dream in my head as I heard the sounds of Salvador getting into the shower and running the water. The dream had seemed so vivid, so real, but there was no way it could have been. I doubted I would be worried over it if Salvador hadn't had the same nightmare at the same time. I shared in his hope about it not being a bad omen, but I couldn't shake a growing sense of dread.

I think I slept that night, I'm not really sure anymore. I woke up late and dragged myself out of bed to find Salvador slouching near the stove, shirtless, and making pancakes. He looked as sleepy as I did, which wasn't surprising given the night we had had. I grunted a good morning and he returned it with that tired smile of his that I was already becoming accustomed to, and even fond of. It was comforting, the way he made no effort to hide his vulnerability. There was almost a strength in that.

"I made us breakfast," he said, giving me the words I most wanted to hear.

"Thank god." I dragged my stubborn feet across the floor and to the little dining room table that had just enough room for four. Allie's tablet – Allie had been my best friend since

grade school – was still sitting on the table from when she helped me move in, and I wondered if she was planning to pick it up before classes started on Monday. I brushed it aside and sat down, elbows on the table and face in my hands. I hardly had the energy to hold my head up. I briefly wondered if this was what Salvador felt like all the time. He seemed okay this morning, okay enough to be cooking.

He bumped my side with his hips as he slid up beside me to get my attention. A plate of pancakes was set before me, and I looked up to thank him for his kindness. Our eyes met, and I froze. I'm not sure I had noticed it when we met the previous day, but his eyes were a pale blue. I jumped, and he noticed, and gave me a sad look.

"Aw, they can't look that bad can they?" he frowned, one hand on his hips.

"No, they're fine, it's just... you startled me, being so close. I'm tired, I get jumpy," I told him as I settled back into my chair.

"Well good. If you're gonna jump out of your seat, you should at least try the pancakes first!" He chuckled to himself as he turned back to the stove, and I watched him as he cooked. My brief panic subsided the longer I looked. Looking at the perfect symmetry of his striped back and arms helped me come back to reality, as did the effort-free pancakes that were steaming before me. I cut into them and took a bite, and sighed away my anxiety.