

## Scissor Lock

For six weeks now Julian awoke in the hospital bed, read the note taped to the ceiling, and wondered, “What the hell is happening?” At least, that is what Dr. Felix wanted Julian to wonder every morning. Some days Julian would wake up wet with sweat from a nightmare. Things were fucked when that happened.

Felix walks up the one flight of stairs to Julian’s floor, slides his key card quickly on the wall quickly—quickly because he didn’t want anyone seeing the embarrassing photo. The one of him in his mustache plus goatee period. It’s been 20 days since Julian’s had a productive dream recall session (DRS), and the stress is starting show on Felix. His face is scruffy, his eyes are tired, and his belly shows a folding line when he sits down.

He opens Julian’s door. Oh good, he thinks, Julian’s reading the post-it notes. Each one saved Felix from explaining that Julian has Anterograde amnesia. That he can’t make new memories. That he lives in a hospital now.

Julian is turning over a post-it note in his hand. “Are you Felix?” he asks, “I don’t remember writing this.” Hands the note to Felix.

“You should leave it on there,” Felix, nodding to the tape player, “The tape will clarify a lot for you.”

Julian affixes the note gently. “What is it called again?” he asks aloud while scanning the bedside table for something. A pen.

Felix gives him one from his breast pocket.

“Anterograde—A—N—T—E—R—O—Do you want paper?” Felix asks.

“Can’t forget it if it’s on my arm,” waving him to keep going.

“Amnesia,” Felix finishes.

Julian pauses over the two words. Without looking up he laughs, and says, "I've probably done this before, haven't I?"

"A few times," Felix says while scratching his cheek.

A knock on the door. And Stephanie is early today, for once. Felix will take that as a positive sign.

"Morning Julian. Dr. Felix," she says, her blond ponytail bouncing with each step. As usual, Julian can't take his eyes off her.

Felix resents the enthusiasm in Steph's voice. Always the optimist, she'd been compensating for his growing frustration a while now.

She's running her fingers tenderly over the scratches on Julian's arms. Like he, Felix, doesn't notice that.

Julian is not progressing the way he and his guy, Jacob, in the IRC had anticipated. And the constant flirting between Steph and Julian is a growing problem. Felix wants to push for more dream therapy. Stephanie wants to laugh at Julian's dumb fuck joke.

"Guy walks into a bar and orders a grass hopper," he says to her while she checks his vitals, "He finishes the drink and walks back onto the street."

Felix writes in the margin of his note pad that Julian has told this same joke five days in a row.

"There he sees a grasshopper, and he says 'hey, you know there's a drink named after you,'" Julian says, gearing up for the punch line, "And the grasshopper says, 'there's a drink named Irving?'"

Steph laughs. Julian smiles. Felix presses forward

"Dream anything Julian?" he asks him.

Julian thinks for a bit, then answers, "I don't remember."

"Why didn't you write them down," Felix asks, annoyed.

"Was I supposed to?"

"Yes. It's the foundation of this research. Of your convalescence—"

"Felix," Stephanie sternly interjects like a mother protecting her do-no-wrong kid.

This is what hiring someone without a Ph.D gets you, a constant roadblock.

"Not even nightmares, Julian?" Felix asks.

Julian shakes his head.

"One day won't hurt anything, Fee," Steph chimes.

And that was his greatest regret, letting her know his mother called him Fee.

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Felix tosses his legal pad on the desk next to the camera, a 16mm Arriflex. VHS tapes are shelved floor to ceiling around the windowless office, a recording method he'd learned as a Columbia undergrad. He pulls a plastic tape from the cabinet, pops it into Arriflex, presses record, and begins.

"Felix, Felix. January twenty two, nineteen ninety-nine. Patient. Abnesti, Julian." Semantics now over. He flips a page on the legal pad and continues. "It is now thirty-seven days since admittance. One week since starting SSRI." Slaps his finger on his notes. Checks med name. Continues.

"Fluoxetine. And sleep patterns growing increasingly inconsistent. Reflected in irregular daytime affect. Patient was adverse to dream recall therapy."

Julian told Felix he wanted to "sleep more." Which meant, "hit the sack." Which meant, "tug on his weasel."

Julian was a one in a million patient, a guy unable to remember anything for more than 8-10 hours. Divorced from his wife, no kids. No distractions. He was a willing participant purely because he had no other choice. Kimi, with her lawyer, signed him over to the hospital, and then used the same pen to sign the divorce papers. Felix had liked her businesswomen attitude. Her red nails.

The waking life manifests itself in our subconscious mind, in the form of dreams. A person (Julian) with retrograde amnesia can't remember waking memories, but he or she can remember dreams. Julian's mind was a blank canvas every day, and a perfect testing ground for Felix's theory: Dreams influenced by waking life could help create non-linear memory patterns for those with damaged or compromised memory systems. He loved that sentence. Dreamed about that sentence nearly every day.

It was the type of work he'd only dreamed of as a Ph.D. candidate. Julian was going to put him on the cover of *Time* magazine. Julian was his ticket to the Nobel.

But right now he was fucking Felix sideways. The dreams he did record were impossible to chart, frantic, nightmarish. Dysphoric. For a week straight Julian described a Succubus-like figure manifesting itself in late REM cycles (hypnagogic). A gentle, slender body, made of shadows. Delicate hands. Small brown birthmark on the index finger. These were Julian's words from his dream journal. He was experiencing isolated sleep paralysis.

Felix finishes his recording, punches STOP, ejects the tape, labels it with the felt tip, and finally archives it with the rest. He takes stock of the room, focusing his gaze in equal

intervals to all four corners of the room, making a mental note to buy more tapes from the Omni the next time he's in town. Until then, he decides a walk will be good.

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The room was completely dark but for a lone bulb dripping from the ceiling. Felix struggled to open the tape.

“Fucking Jesus.”

“Here,” Julian said taking the tape from Dr. Felix. He opened it with ease.

“Sorry,” Felix said, “You're not religious are you?”

“I can't remember.”

Felix slid the tape in. “I want you to tell me about the dream you had last night.

Julian said, “I already wrote it down for you.”

“But I have a theory that reciting it aloud will trigger new memories.”

“Okay, should I start?” Julian asked.

“Think back to the beginning of the dream,” Felix said, “start with the first moment you remember.”

“I wake up,” he said. His hand was shaking under his knee. He looked around the room at the high shelves. They felt like they might fall on him.

Suddenly the thing became vivid in front of him. A wispy, dark shadow, darker than anything he'd ever encountered in the waking world. It was crawling from the side of his bed.

Julian tried to run. To hide. To escape.

It was the worst nightmare. And the sound—like something sucking on teeth, teeth torn from the gums. He couldn't turn to face it, too scared. But also locked in place. Something terrible going on, and all he could do was wait for it to end.

The creature was in his head before it was on top of his chest. Filling his mind with words he couldn't comprehend. Fragments, like artillery shells, syllables flying everywhere. Another language. Arabic maybe.

Then he felt the weight crushing his chest. The more he tried to move, the less he could breathe. Heavy. The creature was so heavy staring down on him. All he could do was accept it. It had a skull of an animal, fleshless. Unlike any animal he'd ever seen. A long mouth with rows of teeth hidden inside, sucking on itself. Human arms, women's arms. Gentle, slender, and delicate with a small brown birthmark on the index finger. He should have been dead.

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Felix walks past Julian's door, then does a double take. The door is closed. He reaches for the handle, but pauses. He can hear his own voice emanating from inside. Julian is playing the tape.

*...Whether we are in the awake world, or in our lucid dream, it is only our perception that arranges our dreams into a linear or timid order...*

A smile comes to Felix's lips, and his demeanor instantly changes with the renewed sense of hope in his work. He feels years younger and inches taller.

They could try an IPDS, that is: Imagery and paired dream symbolization exercise, he and Stephanie. Felix believes Salvador Dali's paintings could elicit the best responses in an IPDS. Dali himself called them "hand-painted dream photographs." Felix called it "the amalgamation of high Art and cutting edge Science," penning and tweaking the phrase in

his head during elevator trips and long waits in the William J. Williams Memorial Cafeteria lunch line on the second floor.

Realizing how silly he must look to orderlies or other passersby, he heads back to his office—the walk now long forgotten—to grab the lithographs. Not a few steps removed from Julian's door though, the handle jiggles and then disappears into the room with the door. Out comes Stephanie. Sucking on her index finger. Doesn't bother to look out her peripheral, and goes the other direction.

That whore. How could he have been so stupid? Obviously she would need to be removed from the project. But under what grounds? Suspicions of compromising privately funded medical research? He'd have to postpone three days minimum to present his case before the board. Airfare. Hotel. Minibar. It would be costly. What if she retaliated with accusations of sexual advancement. A young, beautiful woman. He, a grotesque, middle-aged man.

He could always buy her out. If X is more than the cost of paying her off—he would pay her off. It would be the only way to save himself, and more importantly, his work.

"Felix," Julian calls to him from the threshold, pulling him from his fumigated daze. "We figured out the nightmares."