

Graham is 9 years old and lives in Nashville. His favorite things are playing games with his friends at school and in his neighborhood, writing stories, making comics, and performing music.

Wake Up
by Graham Christiano

The boy lay in bed, eyes staring at the ceiling, sleep pulled on him. The house was silent. Too silent, like it was holding its breath.

Then...a *crack*. Sharp and sudden.

His eyes snapped open.

He didn't move. The sound echoed through the house, and sank into the walls, like it was meant to be there. Like it had returned.

A thought came into his mind, "Did I forget to lock the door?"

Before he could answer himself, his bedroom door creaked.

Not pushed. Not opened. Creeped.

Slowly, it opened on its own. And then...

Something stood there.

A figure. Completely black. Not just shadow, something darker, deeper, heavier. It stepped inside.

The air grew heavy and hard to breathe.

The boy tried to move, but he couldn't. His chest tightened as the thing drifted closer... until it stood beside his bed.

It didn't reach for him. It just watched.

The longer it stared, the more wrong it felt, like it wasn't just looking at him, but in him.

Then...a hand burst out from under the bed.

Pale, thin, and too long to be human.

It grabbed his ankle. Cold shot through his body, and he was dragged down into the mattress. He tried to scream, but no sound came out.

He woke up.

Standing, not in his room. A hallway stretched before him, endless, black, suffocating. The walls seemed to breathe, closing in, and making the space feel alive.

There was no way back. Only forward.

His footsteps echoed, but something was wrong.

There was another echo a half a second after his.

He stopped and the second echo took one more step.

He didn't look back. He walked faster.

At the end of the hallway sat a single object. It was a bed.

The air around it felt thick, like stepping into deep water. Every instinct told him not to get in, but there was nothing else. No doors. No escape. Only the bed.

He lay down.

The moment his eyes closed. Footsteps. He jolted awake. Nothing.

Again, he lay down. Again, the footsteps returned.

Each time he closed his eyes, they followed. Each time he woke, they were nearer.

He tried to stay awake, but something forced his eyes shut every time, dragging him back down.

Until finally, the footsteps stopped right beside him.

He tried to wake up, but his body wouldn't respond.

Something was standing over him.

He felt it before he saw it, a weight pressing down on his chest, making it impossible to breathe.

A shape leaned into view, tall and thin.

Its face moved and twisted like it couldn't decide what it was supposed to be.

It bent closer. Closer. Close enough that he could feel it breathing. Then suddenly...

He woke up in his bed.

His real bed. His real house.

He gasped, sitting upright, heart slamming against his chest.

“Just a dream...” he whispered.

But it felt wrong. It was too quiet.

He looked out the window. Fog. Thick. Endless. Swallowing everything.

And beyond it...nothing. The neighborhood was gone.

Houses...erased. Except his and one other. The silence outside was worse than any sound.

Smiling, he stepped out, his legs shaking and walked toward the only other house. The door stood open, waiting. Inside, a man stood perfectly still.

“I’ve been expecting you. I was trying to harness the power of life. To understand it...I needed someone to study,” he said calmly.

His eyes didn’t blink.

“But now,” he continued, stepping closer, “I’m finished.”

The air grew colder.

“I don’t need you anymore,” he said.

The boy tried to move.

He couldn’t. Not even a finger.

“Don’t worry,” the man said softly, almost gently.

“This was all just a dream...and you’re never waking up.”