

The Somnambulist's Dream

It was another night of sheer terror which invaded my sleep, my very deep sleep. So much so that I couldn't wake up from the horrible dream that was scaring me to death. It wasn't the first one but rather several in a series I've had over the past few weeks. It was the same one, one in which I saw a shadowy figure standing at the end of my bed. It had the outline of a man, at least I sensed such a form but no real substance. The figure was frightening for some reason I couldn't explain. But it did, to the very core of my soul.

I kicked off the bed covers, aiming at the thing staring directly at me. *Stay away from me* my mind shouted. It didn't move, continuing to stare at me with its dark red eyes. I screamed at the top of my lungs. That was when my wife nudged me awake. For a few moments, I clearly remembered the nightmare. I was bathed in sweat and my heart was racing. Calming down, I quickly returned to a deep sleep and slept the rest of the night without experiencing the Shadowman of my dreams.

My wife and I discussed my acting out with the Shadowman. She was worried that I might have a heart attack or stroke while in a state of extreme anxiety and terror. I acknowledged I was worried too. But the question between us was why I was having a panic attack in the middle of the night. Why was I having this same nightmare repeatedly? I told her about the periodic bouts of sleepwalking as a kid. That wasn't unusual and I eventually grew out of my nightly walkabouts. I couldn't recall a traumatic experience in my life which would account for the recurring night terror. No, this was something much more serious. Something I needed to sort out in my mind before I lost my grip on reality. We agreed I would seek professional help for the nighttime condition which was now wreaking havoc with my sleep and my very life.

A sleep study was the first item on my agenda of things to do. I spent a night hooked up to a helmet of wires attached to my head, an electroencephalogram to be precise. I slept soundly at first, dreaming of nothing. But the technicians told me later the electrical impulses in my brain spiked to a high level at one point. They almost stopped the testing worrying that I might have a stroke. They didn't as my EEG rates quickly returned to the normal range. They couldn't explain the sudden uptick in the test, the sharp squiggles on the paper. I could, the Shadowman I suspected.

The next night I had another attack. This one worse than the others, The Shadowman now appeared to have grown. In addition, I could now make out the shapes of arms and legs. It was morphing into something more sinister, something evil. And I acted out again by pushing myself out of bed and grabbing the bench at the foot. I lifted it up above my head and swung hard at the shadow figure, slicing through the air as I did. Just then my wife turned on the overhead light, and I came out of my stupor. Sweat rolled down my face and I was panting. As my breathing slowed and I awakened, I could see the damage I caused. The overhead brass lamp was swinging above us, and I noticed a large dent where I struck it with the bench. The Shadowman was nowhere to be seen. I was embarrassed and scared. And something needed to be done. I couldn't go on with this torment much longer.

I was determined to see this through even though I didn't understand how it would end. So, I finally got up the nerve and Googled sleep disorder specialists. I found one and immediately contacted him for an appointment. I had to wait ten days before I saw him and the menacing of Shadowman continued apace, a malevolent being for certain. It was becoming more distinct in appearance and threatening with each visit. I was at my wit's end, worrying about my sanity.

I told the PhD in sleep disorders about my problem. That a wraith or demon or other horrific spirit was haunting me in my dreams. I thought he'd laugh at my ludicrous explanation of my

Shadowman occurrences. On the contrary, he said what I was experiencing wasn't unusual. History and modernity were replete with similar stories. Psychoanalyst Carl Jung thought that working through these shadowy figures or confronting them was a gateway to personal development and self-discovery.

The shrink said devils and demons in dreams represented something inside me rather than an external force. There was nothing to be afraid of, he told me in a calm, reassuring manner. The demons often represented feelings that have not been resolved. He told me that talk therapy usually resolves the issue and to not worry. Not all dreams of fighting demons are negative, he quickly added. They can also represent a transformative period in one's life, one of maturity and insight into oneself. He explained the medical term was parasomnia where someone feels a presence in the room. Night hags are often reported sleeping on the person's chest. The usual causes of sleep paralysis can be triggered by sleep deprivation, irregular sleep schedules, stress, excessive alcohol consumption or other sleep disorders such as sleep apnea and narcolepsy. Nothing supernatural in these experiences, so he believed. Just emotional issues which must be addressed through talk therapy. But my body wasn't frozen in a state of stasis. I actively tried to defend myself against something horrific, something paranormal in nature.

I didn't have any of the triggers he mentioned except stress. Stress caused by the Shadowman.

However, I felt much better after the visit knowing that what I experienced wasn't unusual and always had a psychological or physical basis that could be worked out with enough insight and therapy. I thought the PhD knew everything.

My spirits were greatly lifted, and I felt better than I had in a long time. I even took the missus out for a Chinese dinner that evening to celebrate the good news. We had a pleasant time now that things were going back to normal or so I thought.

That night was the very worst. And it wasn't because I overindulged with Chinese food. The Shadowman hovered over my bed, encompassing me. I thought I could hear it breathing, a low, slow intake and expulsion of breath. It had a fetid smell, a foul odor, which turned my stomach queasy. Its body was now well defined and ghastly. It stood about eight feet tall and cloaked in black. It had a grotesque, mishappened head and a mouth full of sharp incisors. Its hands were gnarled with pointed nails that looked like long knifepoints, coming lower over my body in a threatening manner. I couldn't imagine a more horrendous creature in my wildest dreams. This was it. I feared for my very existence! I couldn't wake up to save my life. I felt suffocated by fear, an intense fear which I'd never felt before.

Then the phantom revealed itself to me. It spoke in a somber voice, not out loud but more through telepathic communication. I froze when I heard what it said.

Through your dream you have crossed into my realm. Be not afraid mortal because what I want is what you can give me. I have spent time wandering immemorially, coming from the shadows seeking out those who I meet in sleep, deep glorious sleep. It opens a portal between your world and mine. Once opened it can never close. You offer the one thing I am seeking, your soul, your spirit. Yours is deliciously clean and pure. I am what you might call a soul chaser, a collector of men's souls. Your pathetic beliefs and puny religiosity will not save you, nothing will. I have collected many souls but with many more to be had. It is so easy to succumb to my needs, simply fall asleep and open yourself to me through your dreams.

I suddenly awoke, sobbing like a child. Did I just have a hallucination or something much worse which would irrevocably alter my life and beyond? I was too tired to answer the question and quickly fell back into a deep, quiet slumber.

I woke up the next morning feeling somehow different but difficult to determine exactly how. I'd changed in some fundamental way. Of that I was certain. I looked at my wife sleeping beside me and I felt nothing, just emptiness and nothing more. I had no feelings for her. In fact, I had no feeling about anything anymore, just dead to the world. No feeling of joy, no spiritual uplifting, just nothingness. I was doomed to a life without meaning, without purpose and, most importantly, without a soul. I was caught up in a demonic possession from which I could never escape.

I remembered the Shadowman's words which chilled me. Where would I go without a soul? Spend an eternity in Hell or some other godawful place?

The questions would haunt me during my waking hours throughout my days, beyond that point too. I already knew how my nocturnal ones would be occupied. Forever was an extraordinarily long time.