

In the Shadow

Maybe this world is another planet's Hell.

Author: The Storyteller

Days and nights of comfortable routine. Familiar faces always surrounding us, keeping us company. Work, travels, love, kids, friends - such a busy universe. Take-away junk food and a horror movie on Friday nights, then maybe a visit to the old parents on Sundays. So little time, so much to do. It is Monday morning and we start all over again. So many tasks and plans, always moving toward an ever tempting and untouchable horizon. Who can pay attention to all the little details? But then there are other things happening around us, less obvious; and the more we try to ignore them, the more threatening they grow. A shadow missed in a blink of the eye, a soft touch in the middle of a dream, a deep echoing whisper calling out our name; and our heart sinking in a black pit for a moment. Did you ever notice it? Was it real, or only a trick of our tired mind? And who have time for those things anyway? Nonsense. There is a new reality show about to begin, so grab that popcorn and sit there already; it's not worth missing it.

But that blink of the eye...that heartbeat....that feeling of an invisible watcher, waiting for us in the shadow... how long can we pretend they never happened? The dark realm of our nightmares longs for the right to become, for recognition and life. And our denial of their very existence only reinforce the shadows' determination.

How come we still don't understand? As we travel across the vast universe, consumed and bored by our life on this lonely planet, we often gaze at the stars. There must be other worlds out there; fantastic suns and mysterious creatures, reaching for us the same way we try to reach for them. We naively hope for the show of all shows to display itself out of the sparkling stardust of infinity. All the while we silently cross unseen borderlines of reality, stepping into the dark dimensions we never noticed around.

And one day it just happen. In a blink of the eye we are on the other side, yet still in the same place. What was locked break free, what was hidden is now openly moving amongst us, impossible to ignore anymore. The shadows realm penetrates our world, overwhelming it. And everyone's heart is forever sinking in that dark, inescapable pit.

The house was grim and silent against the night like a gravestone. From outside, blind windows on a pale facade, reflecting back the darkness of the moonless night; the entrance door wide open in a frozen scream and dirty waves of fog licking the external walls. Inside, threatening blackness and breathless silence; thick patches of shadowy furniture, hopelessly dissolving in the greater darkness. Void of life, the house stood empty, except for one bedroom on the second floor. In that room the floating shadows were filling the space, flowing against the walls, hastily crossing each other's paths. Darker than the dark itself, their forms were more immaterial than a breeze. Their angry swarming was concentrated in the middle of the room, expectantly circling the indefinite glow under the blankets. And yet, as jittery and overwhelming as their movements were, not a sound broke the still water of silence.

Sitting on the floor with the laptop in front of him, the young man naively covered himself and his computer in layers of sheets. His burning eyes were ardently fixed on the blue screen, while his unsure hands were typing something from time to time. With resolution and despair, both the human creature and the shadow ones were waiting.

The young man hoped for sunrise, for redemption and absolution of light.

The shadows knew that no human can hold on forever on the edge of its own fears.

So they were waiting.

And the time itself was nothing more than the silent echo of an irrevocably lost world.

Chat started at 2:04 AM

"Kevin, talk to me, dude, it's more than five hours since you logged out; I thought I was going crazy. What's your situation over there?"

"It's good, man, it's all good!"

We've gathered everyone here in the old church; more than a hundred people. We have food, and blankets, a landline phone, and now even internet, although weak. If I disappear again don't freak out, it's just weak connection, I'll get back to you as soon as I can. Some other people also brought laptops, so we take turns with the internet. It's the only way to get some news, as scarce as they are. Jason, it's world wide now, they are everywhere.

How are you holding on?"

"I'm okay. I really am.

Alone here, but I'll be damned if I'll let these pieces of crap get me. Just stay with me, Kevin, okay? Don't leave me alone."

"No one else survived?"

"No one that I know of. Since yesterday I couldn't find anyone alive. The town is empty, except for the few bodies of those who killed themselves. People are gone like they're never existed..."

Listen, I discovered more things about them; I think I know why all this is happening."

"What is it? My parents are also here, reading this. What did you find out?"

"Remember that paranormal forum we hacked few months ago? I never told you because I didn't want you to laugh, but before that I downloaded all their stuff...they were into this right from beginning."

"What do you mean?"

"They called them 'the shadow people'. Apparently, these things were living among us forever, but only a few people were able to see them, on the peripheral vision, and most of them were considered wackos.

They said the shadow people never interacted with humans, never paid attention to us. They have no material density. There are also shadow animals; it's like a parallel world, only made of shadows, trapped within our own world. It's us, the people, who always tried to made a contact. And they hated it.

Now - and here becomes interesting - all of a sudden the shadow people changed their behavior. There were tens and tens of pages from people testifying that they've become agitated, even aggressive towards humans. They knew about this long before it was on the news. I've read it all over again while waiting for you to log in; they knew what will happen. But who would have believed this back then?"

"They say why the shadow people changed?"

"There were some theories. Something about solar flares causing strange mutations on matter, on everything on earth. One other guy explained that we aligned with the galaxy's axis, thus entering a new dimension, inaccessible before. A lot of religious hypothesis also, like the gates of hell opening, but nothing certain. Few days ago I would have laughed at it, but now it's too damn real to laugh. Fact is that something released them into our dimension.

To me it seems more like for one reason or another, they've just decided to take over. Maybe there is a critical mass they've reached, so they needed our space. I don't know.

Maybe they planned this from the beginning. I mean, imagine how long they've been trapped between worlds, watching us, hating us, planning to destroy us. And who's laughing now?"

"Man, this is unbelievable... Listen, there's no time, and we don't know how long the few remaining servers will hold on.

Do you know if they have a weakness, a way to kill them?"

The user logged out.

"Kevin, are you there?"

The user is temporarily off line.

"Kevin, I must save power, can't stay online for long; I'll log in every hour to check out if you're back.

Don't leave me alone, bro."

The user is temporarily off line.

Chat started at 4:39 AM

"Jason, I'm here."

"Thanks God, Kevin! Thanks God you're back!
Are you okay?"

"Jason, listen, I don't have much time. We have a plan here. We all voted; at the sunrise we will try to attack them. We'll be going outside with torches, mirrors, everything that can shed light, and we'll chase them back to the hell where they came from."

"No way, Kevin, you can't do that! It won't work!"

"Why not? Father David said only the light can defeat them, and it makes sense. Think about it, Jason, they are shadows, you said it for yourself, they have no material density. What is more potent than light against shadows?"

"Kevin, you have no idea what are you talking about. Don't do that!
They are not just shadows anymore, they are entities now. Even if they can't touch us physically, they CAN harm us! You know what that fog is you see outside? That is what's left of the people who fought them, and that stinking fog won't disappear at the sunrise. They only need us to be afraid of them; then they attack us from inside, through our fear. I don't know how they do it, but I've seen it yesterday. People look into their eyes and dissolve into smoke. Or get mad and kill themselves.
Listen Kevin, the only way to resist them is to become invisible. Silent, without disturbing them, without ever looking them in the eyes or provoking them. This is how I survived so far. Light, on contrary, attracts them; it seems like their mission is to destroy every source of light on earth."

"Dude, I know you mean well, and you may know some things about them, but you can't possibly know that this will not work. What if it does?
Beside that, what else can we do? Where can we go? They're everywhere!
We are the last ones over here. We can't just give up without a fight."

"Kevin, we cannot harm the shadows, trust me on this! At least not yet. Our only chance is to get away and hide in the wilderness. You want to go outside with lights and fire? They will attack you like mad dogs!"

"I don't know what to say, Jason. You seem pretty sure of yourself. But the light attack seems also a great idea.
Wait a moment, we have to discuss this here."

"Guys, you must stop this. If you attack them, you have no chance! Kevin, you must convince them!
Listen, I was thinking about an escape."

We can go out of cities if we are cautious enough. Somewhere in the mountains; there were less people, so the fog must also be thinner. Maybe they didn't even get there.

The shadows are not afraid of light, but they like darker spaces. We can use this. We can organize, we can hunt and fish, we can make fire. There is water in the mountains. We can survive if we hide away, at least until we find a way to fight them."

"Jason, listen. This is Father David."

"Hello, Father."

"First, you must know we all pray for you, son, and keep you in our hearts. You are not alone, dear boy."

"Thank you, Father."

"If you remember His words, God will never leave your side. We also want to thank you for all the information you gave us. May His light be with you, son, and keep you from harm."

"Thank you, Father."

"Jason, it's me again, Kevin. I'm back. We decided to give it a go."

"Man, this is crazy! Why don't you understand that light won't harm the shadows?"

"It's not only me, dude. We had a vote; almost everybody think we should fight. God is with us, and Father David. I've never been religious before, but today I have faith."

"Kevin, don't do it. Don't fight them! God left us long ago, bro...He left us prey to those demons..."

"I must go now, Jason; other people want to use the internet before we go. Be strong there. I'll talk with you after that...to let you know."

"Damn you, Kevin!

Sorry, dude.

Okay, then remember this: if you are not afraid, they cannot harm you.

Whatever you see or hear, don't lose your grip. Only your fear can let them into your mind.

If you find yourself alone against one of them, stay still. Do not look them into the eyes, do not interact with them. Don't make any sudden moves. If you are quiet enough they will eventually let you go.

Promise me at least you will remember this."

"I promise.

Talk with you soon, brother.
Take care."

"You too, Kevin.
I'll wait for you.
I'll be right here..."

6:01 AM The user is temporarily off line.

7:13 AM The user is temporarily off line.

9:05 AM The user is temporarily off line.

Problem loading page.

The connection has timed out. The server is taking too long to respond.

There is no internet connection. For further details please contact your network administrator.

The silence was heavier than death. Alone among the swarming shadows, the young man lay on the bedroom's floor, with nothing to hold in his arms but a dead laptop, and the memory of light held behind its stubbornly shut eyes.

The hooded shadow stood still in the door frame, watching the young man intently. His motionless posture was more threatening than all the other shadows together, and his cruel intentions were permeating the air like a miasma. That one was more than a simple shadow; the way all the other creatures kept distance spoke of authority and hostility even toward its own kind.

Jason's determination didn't waver, his hands didn't shake. It was the time to move on; no other hope was left there for him. With a smooth movement he heaved his backpack and turned toward the door. Tens of flying shadows were circling him, madly hovering over his lowered head, sticking their featureless faces in his face. Their dark, open mouths were distorted in soundless screams; so were the red slits that resembled the eyes.

Steady, with even steps and a blank stare on his face, Jason walked straight toward the door and the frightening form waiting there, the flock of frenzied shadows following him.

Before exiting the room, the young man and the hooded shadow stood for a tiniest moment shoulder to shoulder.

And two worlds found themselves exchanging places, crossing the same invisible borderline between the shadow and light, replacing each other at the crossroad of

eternity. The shadows were moving into the light; the humans were to live like shadows.

Then as swiftly as one of them, Jason passed through the shadow creature and kept going without looking back, while the flying entities returned to the room.

A deserted world of darkness was laying outside. The blind sun that could not pierce the fog was only encasing the empty city in a rotten glow. Slowly, always looking down, Jason made his way among the scattered population of shadows, silent and unaccounted, on the streets of a dead town. Cutting through the ghostly mist like a ship through a motionless sea, Jason wondered if there was any form of consciousness left in the fog that was once living people. Maybe his neighbors, friends or even his family's souls were watching him right now. Maybe they were escorting him, desperately crying for his help. At this thought his heart recoiled in pain, and for a moment his legs trembled.

But only for a moment. The next steps were as confident as ever, taking him deeper into the heart of the nightmare. And his lips were whispering the only prayer worth to remember: *"Do not look them in the eyes, do not interact with them. Don't make any sudden moves. If you are quiet enough you may pass by unnoticed and invisible like a shadow...."*

Back in Jason's dark bedroom, the bodiless creatures were fighting now over a hardily powered laptop left on the floor. On the flickering screen was one last message:

"My name is Jason D. Miller, I am a human being, and I'm still alive.
I know there are other people left too.
Whoever is reading this message, know that there is still hope.
Come to the mountains.
We don't have to die in the dark.
I will never give in. They are only shadows."

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