

The Most Scary Experience

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Probing fear

My **redoubtable** friend Solus “Sol” Simkin wandered into my office late one afternoon and asked me, “What is the most scary experience for a human being?”

I thought for but an instant as I replied, almost reflexively, “Death. What else? Or a close shave with death.”

The hard taskmaster that he is, Sol told me to think again. He told me to imagine a fear that pursues one’s days and nights like a relentless shadow. A fear with no respite. Not the fear of encountering a cobra that wears out in half an hour at most. Not the fear of a narrowly missed road accident that leaves one rattled and shivering for a full five minutes. Not the transient thrill of the roller-coaster. Nor the fear of falling. No, this is a shoreless fear. And nothing supernatural. It is a fear as mundane as the Earth and yet, it is a fear that we do not normally encounter, let alone experience. But when recognized and felt, it is a fear that chills the spine and shakes one’s very core.

“Sol,” I said. What you are asking me to probe calls for long, deep, and hard thought. I need more time, for sure.”

The genre of horror fiction

I had hastily tried to assemble a quick list of scary tales from **H H Munro’s *Shredni Vashtar***, to **H P Lovecraft’s *The Call of Cthulhu***. Then there was ***The Arbor House Treasury of Horror and the Supernatural*** that engrossed me for many days and nights with its eclectic collection of terrifying tales, but none of them had left me a helpless heap of jelly, paralyzed with fear. Then I remembered one of my favourite authors, **Edgar Allan Poe**, and his ***Tales of Mystery and Imagination***, surely among the choicest morsels of the macabre. The injection of fear from these stories had been swift and intense, but not long-lasting. Even the movie, ***The Shining***, based on angst-meister **Stephen King’s** novel of the same name, had been able to terrify me, but only fleetingly.

Homework

“Take your time, and wend your way slowly through the labyrinth of your own memories and pluck for me that single, shiny nugget of fear that dazzles you even today—its power to enchant, enthrall, and engulf, undiminished by the passage of time,” Sol told me soothingly. “I have a reason for asking you to undertake this introspection. I had my own close brush with depthless

fear recently. What I learned from it was unusual, to say the least. I wish to discuss it with you after you have done your own inner exploration. So, when you are ready, we will discuss it in the relaxing and reassuring confines of our favourite coffeehouse. Mind you, be prepared for many sessions before the denouement takes place!”

<https://www.302aw.afrc.af.mil/News/Commentaries/Display/Article/191174/the-prison-of-hopelessness/>

Help O Power Eternal <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/64988-h/64988-h.htm>

“Why is the word ‘hope’ magic?” asked the youngest camel, stretching out one stiff leg to see if it still could move. And now Mohammed’s son lifted the little camel’s head up again and laid it against his shoulder while he shook the remaining cords away. When he did this, the little camel saw that he was young and very handsome. He was wearing a silk turban with pearls and turquoises embroidered on it, and carved gold ornaments^[35] hung from his ears, and there was a look of great gentleness in his face.

“Well, you see, h stands for ‘help,’ and o stands for ‘O,’ and p stands for ‘power,’ and e stands for ‘eternal,’” he said so lightly and merrily that he seemed to be making fun of something. He took out a little ivory flask from his garments and poured some fresh water between the little camel’s burning lips. “So when you say ‘hope’ like that, you’re really saying ‘Help, O power eternal!’ And that means me because I’ve been appointed your patron saint this year.”

Unfinished business

PhD-release syndrome

Post-partum depression

Sri Ramaksishna

Unfinished symphonies/unfinished business

The scariness of the Void

Networking: We are all connected

We are Nature’s Children: smell the roses; smell the coffee; listen to birdsong etc.

Be part of something greater than yourself: serve others

Ultimately, live life with gusto so that joie de vivre spreads from you to others like a sunshine laden zephyr

Poem on “Purpose” from my book

Venkata Vara Prasad episode

Loneliness versus Solitude

Only swimmer in the swimming pool; the last thought; the immensity of the void

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ly99Zhp24LY>

Acknowledgements

Feedback

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