An Imagined Darkness

Our imaginations. It is quite remarkable what they can for to us. From simple day-dreaming to producing art, imagination is a force for good in our lives. Until it’s not. Until it links up paranoia and darkness and becomes the mechanism by which we scare ourselves. Suddenly something as simple as the absence of natural light can turn an innocent garden into a deadly maze or a bustling amusement park into an abandoned death trap. The darkness fuels our imaginations and allows us to project our own worst fears. In my case, the night turned the comfortable two bedroom digs into a haunted house of horrors.

And no, I am not overreacting. It’s always easy to think like that in the day time but seriously, you try waking up at 02:13 am to a banging sound coming from somewhere in your supposedly empty house and then sit there and judge me. I was already on edge but this just dropkicked me over.

As I started creeping down the hallway and towards the sound, I had to try my best not to imagine the plot of some B-Grade horror movie happening to me. As if some brute with a hockey mask and a machete was standing at the end of the passage just waiting for me to come within striking distance. I held my own hockey stick closer and inched forwards.

When I was younger and I woke up scared I would simply go to my parents, one of whom would pick me up and carry me back to my bed. I liked it better when Dad did that because he would do a sweep for monsters and then tell me story. “Child, let me tuck you in bed. Then I shall tell you a tale of a long lost kingdom and of a girl who was bound for glory…..”

Mom tried that routine too but she made the stories up on the spot and could never remember them when I asked her later.

Unfortunately, the corridors that my roommate and I had carted our furniture through just a few days ago offered less reassurance to me than that of my father’s voice. I soon found myself standing alone in the dark with corners of light appearing every so often as cars flashed by the house, miniature lightning bolts whose momentary appearance served only to strengthen the night’s grip on my psyche.

I pressed on down the hall, imagining the structure itself to be a blackened obstacle course from which an agent of darkness could strike out at any time. My mind now saw this place as a valley of evil where death waited for me at the source of that noise.

I heard the sound again and froze. It was in the living room. Shit. Okay. Piper calm down, it’s okay. Let’s go find out what this is.

Wait a second. I was an adult now, I could deal with this. If it was a break-in then I would just call the police. I could deal with it. I didn’t need Mom and Dad or the comfort of knowing that they were there. I chose to move here and I could deal with it. Why was I scared again?

Placing one bare foot in front of the other, I was careful to minimize my sound output as I started moving again. My imagination ran rampant and I could almost make out a shape waiting in the darkness, sitting on the couch and staring out at me from under a goalie mask with a machete perfectly balanced over his shoulder.

When I reached the living room, I crouched down on the carpet and attempted to do my best assassin impersonation as I made my way over to the light switch. Okay. Now or never. I flicked the switch and the darkness disappeared.

In retrospect, it is quite interesting to think about what the night can do to us when assisted by our imaginations. On the other hand, a nightmare is never as scary once you wake up and find out that it was just your imagination. Actually, then it just seems ridiculous. I scanned the room, my hockey stick raised, and realized just how stupid I just been.

As the artificial light revealed the source of the sound, I dropped my stick and buried my face in my hands. The source of the racket was drooling on my couch with a hornet’s nest for hair and what looked like bile remnants in the corner of its mouth. Clad in a red dress and super-heels was my resident roommate, returned a week early from her trip out of town.

Julia, bless her heart, was far too deep in her slumber to hear anything I did, so I got her a blanket and left her be. As I turned off the lights I felt the darkness closing in once again. Though this time I smiled and walked through the passage on my way back to bed.

**Paul Cupido**