



Shadows

A short story

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Shadows

May 1st 2012 – Where to start. I've never written any of this down before and it might not make much sense, but I think I need to start keeping some sort of journal in case anything happens to me.

All my life I've sensed things. Presences, moods, feelings. I only have to walk into a building and I can tell you if certain people are already there. It doesn't work with everyone though. I don't know why it works with those that it does. It's just a weird thing I've always been able to do. Thing is it works with more than just people. I suppose some of the others are still people. They're just not living people. So it works with non-corporeal people as well, if I think about how to put it nicely. With more than just corporeal and non-corporeal people in fact. There are animals – dogs and cats mostly – but there are other things that don't come into the person or animal range. I don't know what they are or even how they are, but they are, and I sense them too. Sometimes they're bright and friendly and cheerful and don't worry me at all. Sometimes they're dark and threatening shadow things and they terrify me. And that's not an easy thing to do.

I've gotten rid of some of these shadow things for people. It's been different every time but I somehow knew what to do when the time came. The nastiest one was a few years ago now and the first one I'd ever, for want of a better word, 'removed'. If other people couldn't corroborate the story, I'd think I was barking mad.

This thing, whatever it was, and I have my suspicions but won't repeat the name here, had been bothering my sister. I didn't find out until I met her for a drink in town one night and because of what I'd sensed in the last few days simply said to her "Dad's back." Our dad had passed away a couple of years before. In the last couple of days I'd been very aware of his presence. She turned as white as a sheet so I asked her whether she'd noticed too.

What she told me was the start of something I may or may not survive.

As she'd slept her awareness of a threatening presence so terrified her that she'd shouted for our dad, waking herself up in the process. She didn't know whether he'd been able to do anything or whether he'd even heard her. You see, my sister has the ability too, but doesn't go with it the way I do but she knew calling for

him in need could make him come to her aid. Well, he must have because I knew he was back on this side and there was no other plausible reason why. Maybe all he could do was alert me so that I could then talk to my sister, prompting her to tell me what was going on. I told her to tell whatever it was to come and pick on me instead, that I wasn't afraid and I'd give it a run for its money. She didn't though. Instead she tried to brave it out and the thing as we shall call it continued to bother her every night when she was at her most vulnerable.

I slept that night with the phone at hand just in case and although I dreamed I didn't remember the dreams as I normally do. However, I woke up with a strong sense of what was going on. From what my sister described I somehow knew, and I do suspect I was told as I slept, that whatever it was, the thing wanted more than just to frighten helpless young women in their beds. I think it was looking for a host; a body to live in and feed from; a means to be seen and heard in the human world; or perhaps it just needed an energy fix. Whatever its reasons, I didn't like it one little bit.

I'd read a bit about things like this, just out of curiosity and maybe a bit of trying to scare myself. I understood that they were not to be messed with and that if they took a host, that person ultimately died as a result. I had to do something to protect my sister so I read up about ways to ward the things off and went out and made some for her to keep near her bed. They didn't work, but some of that might have been that the belief behind their effectiveness wasn't there. My sister hovers between believer and sceptic.

Things soon took an alarming turn when she stayed at a friend's place for the night. For although from the night after sleeping away from home, the thing stopped bothering her, her friend, though, was not so lucky. It seemed to have grown stronger somehow or just had more power over its new target. The fact that it had been able to relocate so easily and had clearly been either attached somehow to my sister or had followed her made me quite anxious about the strength it had. Her friend, she told me was having a terrible time, being shaken violently and dragged by the feet down the bed. I'd heard enough.

People over the years, both corporeal and non-corporeal have told me that what I can do makes me a white witch, whether I chose to be or not. It's something you're born to apparently. I was quite shocked at first and then amused, but now I felt a purpose to it. I thought maybe we could goad the thing into challenging me instead of my sister and her friend although I wasn't sure what I was going to do after that. I said "Tell her to tell it to come and see the witch."

Well that did the trick in as far as it stopped bothering either of them anymore, but I was stumped about how to get rid of it for myself. I habitually walked the dog late at night before I went to bed and the night after I'd laid down my challenge, it was waiting for me at the end of the street. It wouldn't come anywhere near my house, let alone inside. I still don't quite understand that, as though there was some sort of barrier keeping it off my property. It stayed there at the end of the street on the first night. I could feel it watching me until I was out of view and again when I returned. There was a heavy malevolence about it that I'm sure anyone would have felt. The spot where it chose to lurk was strangely close to a streetlamp and whether it drew energy from it in the absence of living sources or whether it was attempting to disguise itself, I've often wondered. But there it waited like a predator waits for prey. It was probably weighing up the odds, waiting for its opportunity. Perhaps I had a guard up as it were; the same guard I use to prevent the non-corporeal people from driving me to distraction. It wouldn't come close but it didn't leave either and that was half my aim. Keep it away from my sister.

It stayed in the same spot outside for one more night, just watching. The answer came to me again as I slept and I don't remember the dreams from that night either. I've always been a bit of a magpie when it comes to tumble stones; those highly polished semi-precious stones you can pick up for pennies in so many stores. I have a little wooden chest full of them. I just can't stop buying them. They were about to become more than pretty trinkets.

It was a freezing cold night and I wrapped myself up in a thick black padded coat that comes down past my knees, but I didn't put on any gloves. Having bare hands was vital. Before I took the dog's leash down from the hook, I went to my box of tumble stones and took out a good sized clear smoky quartz. I was slightly sad

that I was going to lose it to be honest, after all it was a really good one, and I laughed at myself when I thought this thing was depriving me of my precious. I had never realised Gollum was a witch. I slipped the crystal into my right hand pocket and then we went out for our usually nightly walk.

There was one crucial difference this time. This time I let my guard down and I avoided looking at the spot where it had waited on previous nights. Let it think I've forgotten all about it. I needed quite a bit of concentration to keep from putting my defences back in place when every instinct screamed at me to protect myself. As if I'd invited it along, it followed me. Its presence did not become more distant as I walked along the railway as it had on previous nights. It didn't come too close either at first, keeping a good few metres between itself and me. I wondered if it might know what I had planned. If it did, it was one step ahead of me because I wasn't entirely sure myself. Intuitively, I only knew I was going to do something and that the crystal and bare skin would keep me alive.

We were half way around our usual route; just passing a tall hedge where no-one could see us from the houses when I felt it start drawing closer. The dog reacted to it quite clearly. She kept speeding up despite being on three legs. Her accident a few years earlier didn't slow her down at all. She was picking up pace and couldn't stop looking over her shoulder. I knew if she sensed it too, and was obviously scared, I probably wasn't losing my mind.

I knew it was time. I transferred the lead to my left hand and paused, thrusting my right hand into my pocket and clutching the crystal. The dog was frantically tugging to get away now and I was afraid she was going to pull me over. I relaxed my mind completely and un-tensed my shoulders, not allowing thoughts to form in my mind. Somehow I managed to reach total stillness - a surprising sense of complete inner tranquillity that usually takes years to master. Then I felt it hit.

It was, as I've said, a freezing cold night but where I felt it trying to get in and take over my body, the heat was phenomenal. In the small of my back, there could have been red hot coals for all I knew. The sweat began pouring down my spine. My hands were clammy and I knew there must be beads of perspiration standing out all over my face. I'd been shivering from the cold just seconds ago.

With sudden, instinctive insight I knew now what to do.

Before the thing could take hold, I snapped my eyes open and closed myself off but for one channel. I focused hard on the crystal in my hand and channelled the heat, which I took to be the thing or at least its power, into the crystal. It might not have gone in to the crystal as such, but it became irrevocably attached.

I don't know how long it took. It might have been seconds, it might have been minutes. I only knew I'd succeeded when I felt suddenly freezing cold again. I was now colder than I'd been before because I'd been perspiring so heavily. I imagine it was like leaving a sauna to roll in the snow. I'd surprised the thing and now it was bound to an object that I felt certain it wasn't able to get free from. As if to confirm and celebrate my success, the dog was in much lighter spirits and no longer seemed to be afraid of some unseen threat. She bounced about like her usual self. I've always wondered whether she could see the thing or, like me, only sense it. I don't want to imagine what it looked like to eyes that could see it.

We hurried home and before I even took off my coat, I put the crystal in a ring-box which I sealed with a tight binding of black silk and left it where it could be neither knocked over nor forgotten. As if I'd forget that night in a hurry! I was of course worried that if it was able to throw a person around, it might be perfectly able to move the crystal and come after me again. The fact that it didn't makes me think I'd somehow channelled it right into the smoky quartz. I hadn't said a word during the encounter with the entity - simply focused my intent. It seems strange to apply logic to something like that, but I do try to apply logic to everything, regardless of the situation. Sometimes I think it makes me seem cold but it's because I'm working out why my intuition is telling me something and usually arrive at the right conclusion.

The next morning, I took the box to work with me. At the time, I worked next to the river and I knew what I was going to do at the first opportunity. I took a later lunch than usual, giving the tide time to come in and swell the waters to maximum and I walked along until I was a good distance away from the office buildings. I found a spot where no-one would see me and the river was strong. Slipping the ring-box from my pocket and the crystal from the box with care, I drew back my arm

and threw it as far as I could into the raging waters. As far as I know, the thing it contained has never bothered anyone again.

There were more to come over the years but regardless of the situation I never came close to feeling as threatened as I did with that one. Often they've been as simple to deal with as saying repeatedly over a number of nights "get out and bother no living thing again". They do, for the most part listen. Sometimes I've discovered they were attached to an object, and I've known after sleeping to burn, bury or drown the object. Perhaps it has something to do with the elements. I've heard of Elementals but have never really known how the name arises. Maybe you need to use the corresponding or opposing element to get rid of them. Whatever the answer is, the action I need to take has always come to me. Whoever or whatever tells me obviously knows what's right and I trust the information.

I've never been afraid as such or felt like a specific target before. I've always been the challenger, not the challenged. Something's happened lately to change that though.

Last night one of the darker varieties of these things was present in my house. They don't usually dare to enter this house and I don't know what's encouraged them to start doing so now. I haven't been well for some time and I've suffered some terrible losses in my life. Things will never be the same again on any count, I know that much. Perhaps I'm naturally vulnerable for the first time. Maybe I'm subconsciously leaving my guard down in the hope that I'll see, hear, or sense the presence of someone I dearly miss.

It might of course be even simpler than that - maybe I shouldn't have moved the bay tree. I remember reading something about them keeping evil quite literally at bay. I planted it because I wanted fresh bay leaves. I don't know anything much about the 'traditional properties' of things. I know doc leaves are good for bites and stings, foxgloves are poisonous but are used in medicine and that's about it. I really should have done more reading and found someone that understood these things instead of trying to figure it out alone. The thing is I don't believe in magic and I don't believe in witchcraft and I know that if I try to get help with my gift, curse, whatever you want to call it, at some point that will come into it.

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I might be a natural witch. I don't really know what the qualifications are. I'm sure it doesn't have to mean cauldrons and broomsticks. I mean, at one time a witch was a woman that knew things and made medicines; the village wise woman. I still don't believe that's me though. I don't feel knowledgeable enough.

Rituals, I understand as a means to focus the mind and intent, we all have our little rituals although we tend to call them routines, but they will only ever work if you believe them. The same I suppose applies to spells. If you curse someone, it will only have any effect if you tell that person you've placed a curse on them. It's worked like that down the centuries and has more to do with psychology than cosmology. I did a presentation about it in my student days. There was a stunned silence when I got up and drew a swastika on the whiteboard - it used to be a fertility symbol. Then I talked about the gypsy who'd cursed me a few days before. After she did, I dropped all of my papers all over the bus and I blamed the curse. My folder would have broken whether I'd refused to buy a glass pebble or not, but she planted the seed of doubt and that was all it needed. Simple psychology.

What I do definitely believe is that there is something beyond this life. I don't know what, I don't know how, but there is something beyond the physical world we inhabit as living beings. I've seen, heard, felt, smelled and sensed too many things that cannot be explained by anything in current scientific thought. Today's science is yesterday's paranormal. Science has a way of stripping away the layers of mystery the world once had. That great beyond might be explained one day, but until then, it's up to people like me to know it's there and stop it intruding on the lives of the living.

I've 'moved on' a lot of non-corporeal people. Word gets around that I can do it and I fit house calls in around my very no-nonsense reason and logic focused day job. People usually appreciate an evening visit anyway - these things are always more evident in the evening and no-one has to take a day off work for me.

Anyway, last night this new shadow thing was in my house and what made it all the more real was that the cat was watching it. I couldn't see it. I could only sense it, but sense it so strongly that I could almost hear it moving and even breathing. It's stronger than the one I've described just now. It has such a dense,

dark presence that I was utterly petrified, jumping at my own shadow. I got the fright of my life when I heard what I thought was a dragging sound and then a muffled growl. The noises turned out to be my own stomach which was easy enough to tell when I lifted my head off the pillow and had both ears at my disposal. Even realising what was a hilarious mistake in the cold light of day, I couldn't laugh for fear, and feeling no less threatened I lay back down with my entire spine tingling, anticipating something even worse.

I fell asleep eventually through sheer tiredness and woke up feeling fine if a bit tense. Consequently on every phone call I've had today I've chattered on non-stop. Maybe I feared the silence when no-one was speaking, but phone calls have to come to an end and nothing has happened for lack of conversation. I must sound crazy, but as dusk begins to fall, I feel uneasy and think there will be more tonight. What if the crystal shattered and the thing got free after years of growing angry and gathering strength? What if there's some sort of bounty out on me because I've removed so many of them? I don't even pretend to know and I don't have time to find someone that might. I just know it will be dark soon and my defences are not enough.

The detective in charge of the investigation put down the notebook with a shiver. He'd read it several times in the last few days. The journal had only one entry and that was it. It can't have been long after writing what she probably thought no-one would ever read that Mellissa Gibson had apparently gouged out her own eyes with her finger nails then thrown herself through a plate glass window, falling three storeys to her death.

It was tragic. Investigations showed that she had indeed helped a lot of people remove what seemed to be problematic ghosts and spirits from their homes and those people believed in her. The sister had turned white with terror which he took as confirmation of the story about 'other things'. How did you file that in a report even if you did only just believe it? What she'd said about taking hosts and the hosts always dying - was it fact or was she really crazy?

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He put the notebook in his pocket. Someone should preserve the story if only for posterity. Feeling a nasty presence in the room, he chided himself for having an overactive imagination...