

1.

"Daddy, how much further?"

"We're in town now, sweetheart. We'll be there in five minutes."

Steven Delmount was driving his family to their new home. He and wife Lisa had just bought a two story Victorian era residence near Buffalo, New York. Riding in the car was Steven, his six month pregnant wife Lisa, their eight year old son Seth, and their five year old daughter Sarah.

"Daddy, can we stay in the new house today?"

"No sweetie, we can visit the house today, but we'll stay in a hotel tonight."

"Dad, is that our new school?" asked Seth.

"Yes Seth, and we'll have you in classes there early next week."

"Oh, great," Seth replied with an apathetic tone of voice.

The Delmonts passed a school complex and traveled two more blocks. They made a right turn and their new house came into sight. It was a beautiful two story house with white wood siding and green trim, shutters, and roof. A very decorative fascia trimmed the roof and the windows stretched a full ten feet from the interior floors.

"Well kids, here it is," said Steven. His children expressed awe and astonishment.

"Dad, who lives here right now?" asked Seth.

"No one, the house has been abandoned for years."

"I thought I saw someone in a window."

Seth fixed his gaze on a window on the second floor of the house at the south west corner. He thought he saw a boy, just about like himself, peering out the window as if waiting for someone.

"Which window?"

"That one on the second floor." Seth pointed to the window from the car. Since he was driving, Steven couldn't tell where Seth was pointing.

"There's no one here, Seth. We're all alone here today."

Seth watched the boy intently until the boy walked away from the window. His hand seemed extended as if an adult were leading him away.

"It sure looks like someone is in there."

Steve pulled his car into the driveway. The two children bolted out of the car while Steve helped his wife step out. "Hurry up daddy, hurry up," cried Sarah. Seth and Sarah jumped around on the porch while Steve and Lisa walked to the house and ascended the steps. Steve unlocked and opened the door.

"Look around kids. Be careful on the stairs," said Steve. Sarah lumbered up the stairs as Seth first ran through all the rooms on the first floor and then raced up the stairs.

"I think they'll love the house," said Lisa.

"I hope your right. There isn't a lot of property for sale this close to the store." Steve worked in a nearby sporting goods store and had been driving for forty minutes each way. With a growing family Steve was looking for a bigger house and a shorter commute.

Sarah came across a boy just about Seth's age. The boy smiled at her with an almost porcelain complexion and black ink color to his lips and around his eyes.

"Hi," Sarah greeted.

The boy just smiled back. Slowly Sarah started to hear the boy's thoughts in her mind. We're going to have fun together. We're going to spend lots and lots of time having fun, away from those grownups.

Sarah turned back to the staircase and ran down.

"Daddy, who lived here before us?" asked Sarah.

"I told you kids, no one was here. This house has been abandoned for years."

"I think they were here. They left a boy behind."

"What?"

"There's a boy upstairs. The other people must have left him behind when they left."

"I said no one lives here," Steve responded with agitation. Seth peered through the staircase railing at his father and Sarah. He didn't know what was wrong, but he knew something was definitely wrong. He had seen a boy in the window. It did feel like someone was occupying the second floor. Usually Dad was right, but not this time, and it scared him terribly.

Steve felt a small tug at the base of his slacks. "No one lives here," he exclaimed. In the exact same location, in the exact same house, but in a far away dimension, a small boy tugged at the pants of the man he saw in front of him.

"Mister, can you help me find my daddy? Mister? Mister, please help me find my daddy?"

After their first day at the new school, Lisa picked Seth and Sarah up. During the drive home Lisa questioned the two about friends they were making at school. Seth recounted three friends and the events of their meeting. Sarah sat motionless and disconnected. Lisa was beginning to wonder how hard the move was on Sarah.

At home Sarah went straight to her room. She sat in a small chair behind a small table on which a play tea set was placed.

"Do you want cookies with your tea?" she asked.

The boy with the porcelain complexion sat in a chair on an adjacent side of the table. His hand moved a small tea cup toward Sarah. Sarah pretended to pour tea into his cup. The boy's expression stayed locked in a sinister grin.

"I made a new friend at school today," Sarah said. "Her name is Tracey. She likes to play tea time just like me."

Sarah continued to expound about her day at school. The boy just grinned, motionless.

One weekend Lisa was fixing lunch for Seth and Sarah. She fixed each a plate with a sandwich and potato chips and a glass of milk. She called Seth and Sarah to the kitchen table. Seth came quickly but Sarah stayed in her room.

"Sarah, come get your lunch," she said.

"I can't mommy. My friend isn't done with his tea." Sarah had been playing tea time with an imaginary friend for hours at a time since they moved. Steve and Lisa were concerned with the obsession she had with tea time but brushed it off as a way of dealing with the stress of moving.

"Sarah, you have to have your lunch. your friend can wait."

Sarah came grudgingly into the kitchen. "My friend is mad now! He's going to hurt something!"

"Sarah, I'm sure your friend knows you need to eat your lunch."

"No he doesn't!"

Carrying a dishcloth, Lisa proceeded from the kitchen to an adjoining laundry room. Before she could get to it, the door slammed shut. Lisa shrieked and both children stopped eating. Lisa stood in front of the door for a minute trying to find a justification in her own mind for the door slamming. She began to reach for the door knob but before she touched it, the kitchen faucet turned on.

"Mom, is the water supposed to do that?" asked Seth.

"No, definitely not."

"I didn't think so."

Lisa calmly turned the faucet off and both children quietly continued to eat. No one spoke of that incident for a few days.

A few days later after a hard day at the store, Steve arrived home and proceeded to relax in his recliner with the afternoon paper. Lisa was busy in the kitchen. Steve presumed that Seth was doing his homework and Sarah was playing tea time. Suddenly the television set turned on.

"Seth you can't watch TV until your homework is done," said Steve.

"I can't have it on right now?"

"No, not until I see your homework."

The television turned off for a brief second. Then it turned back on.

"Seth I told you...."

Steve turned to where he had heard Seth's voice. The remote control was lying on the coffee table undisturbed and no one was in the room but Steve.

"Seth, stop playing games with me."

Lisa came in from the kitchen after hearing Steve's voice. "Steve, Seth stayed home from school today. This lack of sleep he's been having is wearing him down. He was all congested this morning."

"He was right here turning the TV on and off."

"You're the only person in the room, hon."

Steve grabbed the remote and turned off the TV. "I heard him right here in front of me."

"Seth's upstairs in bed. It must be something else."

Lisa proceeded back to the kitchen and Steve resumed his newspaper reading. Then the TV turned on again. Steve gasped and flinched. He fixed his gaze at the corner of the coffee table where the remote was located.

"Sorry," a voice echoed from the corner of the coffee table and the television turned back off.

Steve sat motionless for a minute. His breathing was short and shallow and his heart was beating ferociously. "Who are you," he carefully whispered.

"Lisa, there must be something going on in this house." Steve sat at the foot of their bed while Lisa undressed. "I mean, I definitely heard a boy's voice. The TV did turn on and off by itself. Am I going crazy?"

"Could you have simply been thinking of Seth's voice?"

"I didn't hear a voice until the TV turned on."

After a long pause in the discussion, Lisa spoke. "The other day when I was feeding the kids, a door slammed in front of me and the faucet in the kitchen turned on."

"Why didn't you mention any of this before?"

"Even though it scared the hell out of me, I was more focused on the kids well being. I guess I didn't want to show any fear in front of them." Another long pause elapsed while Lisa finished dressing for the night. "Do you think we have a haunted house on our hands?" Lisa questioned sarcastically.

"I think we have something."

"Do you really expect me to believe that you believe in ghosts? I thought you'd be much more level headed than that."

"These things don't just happen."

"Maybe they do just happen. Maybe there's an unknown phenomenon which is making doors slam, the faucets turn on, and TVs go on and off."

"Yeah, last time I checked that phenomenon was called 'Ghosts'."

"We don't have ghosts. We have a new house with some unknown issues."

"Well if these 'unknown issues' continue I'll call someone to check it out."

"Who you gonna call? Ghost Busters? Are you going to look up the local ghost exterminators in the phone book. I don't think you'll find any."

"Don't patronize me, Lisa. I think we have a real problem." Without any further discussion they both retired for the night.

Seth lay drowsy yet anxious in his bed. The dream was getting more and more detailed every night. Even though he was wickedly tired, he was reluctant to fall asleep. The full moon shined through his window giving him comfort that he wasn't fully in the dark. He could still see his beloved model car on the shelf, the signed football and basketball secure in their cases, and the poster of his favorite wrestler, Dave Corelli, on the wall. What would Dave Corelli do? How would he deal with these nightmares? Seth slowly drifted off to sleep imagining Dave Corelli battling the great red monster.

In his dream Seth was walking down a worn dirt path through the woods. The great red

monster was taunting from inside the woods. "Don't ignore me," said the monster. "I will show you my power. I will show you my strength. I will show you my plans for you." Seth just kept walking down the path, trying to concentrate on the sounds of the wind and wildlife in the area while ignoring the taunting of the monster.

Seth found himself approaching a settlement. He crouched behind a hedge to remain unseen by the inhabitants. He saw a long building which was covered in animal skin. Three pillars of smoke came from the top of the building. Outside the building several people dressed in tan clothing mingled. Three men stood near the building with their hands tied behind their backs. They were nude with fierce looking tattoos covering their faces, arms, chest and thighs. All three men had shaved heads except for a mane of hair running down the center of their heads. Two elderly men emerged from the building and the crowd started to escort the three men away. "Let me show you what I did to persecute these warriors," sneered the red monster from behind.

Seth saw an image of an elderly man, whom he understood as an Indian elder. He also saw a venerable old woman who had been the tribe's healer. The red monster sneaked up on her and embedded itself within her. The woman then walked up behind the elder and struck him in the back of his head with an ax. She then carved off his hair with a knife. Then she planted the scalp near the bed of an innocent warrior.

Seth now found himself tied between two trees, his arms and legs both spread and secured to the trees. He was nude and could see tattoos on his chest. Two of three men he saw earlier were also secured between two trees each with their arms and legs spread. He saw ahead of him one of the old men who had come out of the building. "Carry out the punishment," this man said. Seth then felt the sharpest, strongest, hottest pain of his lifetime shooting from the back of his neck. The pain traveled quickly down the center of his back to his buttocks. Screaming wildly in pain he then felt two sets of hands grabbing on to the wound in his back. The hands proceeded to pull his back in opposite directions, causing Seth to scream and wiggle uncontrollably. He could feel further wounds developing and the lobes of flesh ripping from his back to being pulled toward his arms and legs.

Having passed out from the pain, Seth awoke on the ground in front of the execution site. He was laying in the shadow of the red monster. He looked up to see the skins of the three warriors stretched out and suspended from the trees. A fire pit was smoldering with the bones and muscles of the warriors in it. As he stood up, the red monster grabbed Seth from behind and turned him toward the monster's face. "I can do the same thing to you, if you don't carry out my wishes." Seth could feel the hot breath of the monster on his face. Seth's body was frozen solid with fear. The monster stared him down. He then felt a new hand on his shoulder.

"You are not alone, Seth. We're here with you."

Seth awoke in his bed covered in a mixture of sweat and tears. He could still feel the wound running down his back. He could also feel the stern grip on his arm of a hand he could barely see. One of the Indian warriors sat on his bed holding his arm. The translucent warrior appeared the same as in the dream except he was clothed from his waist down in tan deer skins and had the ax and knife on him. Tears streamed down the warrior's tattooed face and Seth realized the warrior's grip was friendly.

"Go back to sleep little man. We'll keep the beast from bothering you tonight." Seth heard the words of warrior in his head. He tried to relax as much as possible in his bed. He gazed away at the other two warriors who were standing guard at each side of his bedroom door. He eventually slipped back into sleep. This time he dreamed of Dave Corelli.

The next morning Seth awoke the most refreshed since the move although he was still very much on edge. He came out of his room to go downstairs for breakfast when he passed his sister simply standing in the hallway staring at him. "They can't help. He will get you soon," she said with a cold blank look on her face. Seth choked a bit and walked away calmly without uttering a word.

A few days later Steve had come home from work and sat down to relax in his recliner with his newspaper as usual. The TV turned on again. This time Steve let the TV go and decided to try to converse with the entity.

"You like the TV?"

"Yes, it's a true miracle." Steve could hear the voice clearly although he new nobody was there.

"What's your name?"

"Johnny." The TV changed channels to one showing a cartoon.

"Do you live here."

"Yes, at least until I find my daddy."

"What happened to your daddy?"

"He went off to war. My mother and I won't leave until he comes back."

Steve sat motionless with a tear forming in his eye. He had family members that served in wartime, but never had the family lost a member due to war. This information both disturbed and moved Steve. He lifted his eyes slightly and looked straight ahead. In his peripheral vision he could see a translucent figure. A boy about seven or eight sat on the floor staring at the television set. The boy was attired in baggy pants with suspenders and a button down shirt.

"Johnny, what war did your daddy go off to fight?" Steve asked.

There was no response and Steve detected no movement with his peripheral vision. He figured that Johnny had left so he bent over toward the remote control to turn the television back off. Suddenly the apparition of Johnny appeared directly in front of him and facing him.

"It's not me. I'm not the one having tea upstairs!" the apparition shouted. As quickly as it appeared the apparition dissolved. Steve's wonder and sorrow quickly changed to shock. He sat a minute thinking about the exchange that had just happened. He decided he must document this incident before he forgot it. He went into his den, grabbed some printer paper, and sat at his desk. He carefully wrote down the conversation and observations as accurately as he could remember.

"Mr. Delmount, were do you want the banner hung?"

Steve stood catatonic in the aisle at the store. He could not stop from thinking about the conversations with Johnny.

"Mr. Delmount. The banner!"

"Sorry Craig. Hang it from that grid work," Steve said as he pointed at the ceiling.

"Anything wrong Steve?" asked Jim Harris, Steve's store manager.

"Yeah, Mr. Harris. Mr. Delmount keeps spacing out for some reason," said Craig

Jim Harris put his arm on Steve's shoulder and started escorting him towards the store office. "I've noticed you're not yourself lately, Steve. What's wrong?"

"I think we're all still recovering from the move. The school's been telling us that Seth can't concentrate and may have a learning disability. They think Sarah's anti-social behavior is an indication of an emotional problem. None of this was here before we moved. And Lisa doesn't seem to be bothered by any of it."

"Is she dealing with the pregnancy well?"

"The baby doesn't seem to be an issue. I don't know. I know I'm not as sure of what's going on as I usually am."

"Do you need some time off?"

"Absolutely not. I need to stay away from that house!"

"Keep your head on the store then Steve. I'm counting on ya." Jim Harris headed into the store office. Steve walked casually around the store and slowly engaged himself back on Craig's projects.

That night Steve returned to his office and opened up a notebook in which he was documenting the encounters with Johnny. He glanced through the thirty pages he had written so

far. Each encounter started out simply enough, he posed a couple of questions and learned a bit more about Johnny. But each one ended the same way. "It's not me. I'm not the one having tea upstairs." Steve had asked Sarah about her imaginary friend before and she had said his name was Johnny. If Johnny was telling the truth, then who was Sarah having tea with?