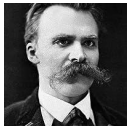


24. Purgatory Calls My Name, Returning Would Be So Sweet



"He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how."

— Friedrich Nietzsche

1.

I walked down some steps gently with my walking stick, metal and a cat's head handle with green, mysterious eyes. The horror film had been desultory, I had lost count of the cliches and it had been laughably 'based on a true story'. It was at best a comedy, a ridiculous attempt to scare and portray evil. To watch it was at least a distraction from the real evil that men do. And the other evil.

It was late, the overhead lights dim, and the corridor stretching out far to the next steps and an elevator. The carpet was mainly a red repetitive design and it was all glass to the left, with a partition wall to the right. Through the glass I could see some of the city, and my own reflection. Bald, beard, smartglasses, brown elk leather longcoat, grey cartoon hoody, black soft shoes. A stare into the distance, the ether, and a stare at myself. I continued my walk, my stick ferrule creating a deadened cadence on the carpet by my right leg. I had splashed out on a double of movies, had been there since late afternoon, a successful distraction for everything beyond the walls of each screen, my mind able to focus on the flickering images and lights, straining to hear the conversations that always seemed so muted these days.

'*Let the evil in, Nigel*', came unbidden into my head. A neutral voice, unrecognisable, but more defined than the words said in either movie. '*Let the evil in, Nigel, let it in. Just give up,*' it continued, coercing me like a languid and feminine embrace wrapping around me, ready to pour into my mind. 'No,' I thought, 'No thank you' was my polite reply. The corridor seemed to draw out, extend, creating more time for me to reach the end, as well as for me to be exposed. '*Let the evil in, you need to let it in*', was the soft plaintive entreaty, acting like a tentacle trying to find a way in. Any breach in my resolve, and exposure to me inside, my soul, the remainder of my life.

And there they were, the one that was purportedly my mother, then the one who had claimed to be my father. In my mind, memories like a third movie being screened in my evening. But also there, standing as apparitions at the end of the drawn out corridor, a tunnel of horror. She had that resolute look, pale skin, jawline rigid, light glimmering on her glasses, but her cold eyes, her icy fury radiating from them, her brown hair with wisps of white tight and drawn back. Her face and her liquid nitrogen eyes fixed and glaring at me with the look that once frightened a little boy, but attempted to scare me now, a grown man. And he, my father, lightly tanned, olive and brown Indian complexion, thinning black hair with elements of salt, thin and tight lips, dark glasses and dark eyes, a shark's eyes. Dead eyes.

There they stand, refusing to leave, my life, and the corridor. '*Let the evil in, Nigel, open up to it, let it in,*' continued that soothing, beguiling voice. And despite this threat and the situation I found myself in, my thoughts wandered back, back to that night. Back to when the evil almost charged me to concede, to let it in, and be like the two of them, the apparitions ahead.

2.

I was playing. In my bedroom, the un-childlike carpet with its floral design, the matching curtains, single bed, and various storage. I was sitting on the carpet, playing with the action man base I had made out of polystyrene packing, the main action man, and the two 'little big men' soldiers, weapons,

uniforms, all the items to excite a child of my age. I must have been about eleven, but time has passed, the memories a little fragmentary, perhaps also because I'm scared. The two who were my parents were out, I don't recall where, and I was left in on this winter's night, the outside cold and dark. Pitch black, only stars and streetlights disrupting the deepest of black. The curtains were shut, and so was the door, painted white on the inside, I believe the same on the outside. And though I was playing, my action men, the base I had made them like a new home, I was scared. No, I was terrified.

It was some time after they had left, but the atmosphere in the house had grown stifling, thickened, a malevolent and brooding presence pervading our house. It was seeping through the space around the door, I could feel an icy touch, so faint, hardly perceptible, but it was there. I was terrified, a little boy being hunted, being surrounded for the kill. And then it started. The sound of creaking outside my door, that barrier that had all my wishes to protect me while I cowered in the middle of the floor. The creaking sounds increased in volume, in intensity and frequency, and it began to sound like there was a crowd out there. Marching, running, walking, so many in such a small place, the sounds becoming deafening as the tears dripped from my face. I forlornly tried to continue playing, but my throat was dry, I could barely speak. The action men could not save me, even if they wanted to try.

I was shaking, perhaps a muted whimper emanating from my mouth, and the tears continued, like my soul was starting to melt. I could hear that cacophony outside my door, I hear it now as I write, a chill between my shoulder blades, then in the little boy's night, and now in my own night here. It felt like that the oppressive presence was leaning in, pressurising the door. It was only closed, there was no lock, no way of barricading myself in. By now I was curled up, like a small animal trying to be missed, avoiding slaver jaws that would rip me into pieces to be swallowed whole. I was also curled up in my mind, trying to keep a wall up, a barrier to whatever was attempting to break its way in. Beyond terror now, I felt the pressure on the door, the sound of so many stepping outside, and I was wondering how I would end. I hoped for it to be quick, not to be in long drawn out pain.

Curling up as tight as possible in body and mind, I endured the onslaught, a howling wind of evil swirling and pushing so hard to get in, first the room, and then into me. Why did they leave me here alone? I think I was rocking in that foetal position, the tears streaming easily, my soul losing parts like a glacier in the hot, direct sun. I am going to die I thought, I am going to die, here in my bedroom, I am going to die. I lost sense of time, I lost sense of everything, except the evil pushing at the door. Perhaps minutes, possibly hours, maybe an eternity flowed by, the sands of time lost in the darkness outside my threatened psyche. I was breaking apart, dismantling, my sanity needing to escape, leaving me behind for the evil to occupy.

The silence. A total absence of sound, spontaneous and abrupt, more frightening than all those boots. My door was opened by one of my parents, I remember not which one of them broke through. I almost vomited, gulping in air, making some pathetic excuses for my frightened state. No sympathy, of course, there never was, just told to go to bed, it was late and school beckoned in the morning, no more playing around, light on, or silliness. I recall I slept hardly at all that night, I slept badly for a number of nights. I would curl up in my bed, covers up, sometimes over my head. I squeezed my eyes, occasionally peeping out into the darkness of my room, cold sweat making me shiver, but nothing seemed to come back.

I never forgot that night, and on occasion, the entreaties to let the evil in would visit me like an old friend, reassuring and soothing, but imperilling my very essence, wanting to drag me away for some sacrificial and nefarious want. And that's when I understood, though my parents tortured, battered, abused, and played with my head, there is real evil, it exists. I know, I met it that night. A terrified eleven year old boy, left alone by two evil people, to face a bigger, more ancient evil in their stead.

3.

My thoughts returned to focus on the corridor ahead, those two, and the persuasion to succumb to the evil that has stayed with me for most of my life. *'Let the evil in,'* and my polite reply, 'No thank you, not this night'. My stick tapping time quietly in the plush carpet as I moved resolutely to my dead parents, no embrace needed, there is no love or forgiveness here. I picked up a bit of a march, avoiding reflections in the glass, elk leather making its unique rustling sound. My mind closed off, ignoring the two revenants trying to frighten me to let it, the evil, into my consciousness and soul.

'No, not tonight, not any night, thank you,' and I felt that this had been a half hearted attempt, playful, but no onslaught for me to fight for my very being. And then, nothing. The corridor, dim light, and me, walking to the next flight of stairs. I took them slowly, a little sideways, to ease the pain in my right knee, stick thumping down step by step. I did not look back, facing ahead, concentrating on the stairs. A goodnight to the lady behind the counter, as I reached the ground floor, I even contemplated a third movie, something to focus on and leave aside all the evil trying its best to get into me. But, no, down to the car park, paying and then driving off to home. My thoughts were quiet, ruminating as I drove along quiet roads and streets.

And by the time I had returned home, door locked and a slight feeling of relief, I wondered if this was reality, or was I in purgatory right now. It calls to me to join it, the evil, and to let it have my life in return, an eternity in the limbo between heaven and hell, until the last sun runs out of light.

And I'm sharing this with you, my appreciated reader, for I have met evil, it exists, and one night, if you're not careful, if you're not prepared, and if you had been visited like me as a child, you may meet it again too. And though I hope you never do, take this warning, because, well, because, my dear reader, every word of this account has been true.

Purgatory may call, it may be inviting you. Don't listen to it, however sweet its voice, protect your soul, keep the evil out. And warn others. Evil exists, and it might want you.