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THE MONSTER IN MY ROOM

Thomas Pool

WHEN I WAS A YOUNG BOY, MOST NIGHTS I WOULD LAY AWAKE IN BED WONDERING WHEN MY TIME WOULD COME. HOW MUCH LONGER TILL THE MONSTER in my room gobbles me up? Grownups always dismiss this fear as a child's wild imagination. When was the last time anyone heard a news report of "Death by Monster?" Still, all my friends felt a presence, and there are countless stories about a monster under your bed or in your closet. Its stare covered me more than my blankets ever could. I felt like a prey. I was convinced that if I was not careful enough, something extraordinary might actually happen to me. In my adolescence, this childish fear became more faint. Although there certainly were times when I would turn off the hall light and then race to my well-lit bedroom, and I know most of my peers had done the same. We made fun of each other for these antics. You no longer believe in Santa Clause or the Tooth Fairy, so we feel the need to run away from the dark part of the house? It was not because I was afraid of an intruder or kidnapper. It was because something in me still felt the need to be cautious about a monster. But even teenagers know to dismiss this as a child's overactive imagination, even though the fear still feels real.

Years later my wife and I had our first child, a son. We took every precaution keeping him safe. We installed an alarm system on the doors and windows, developed good hand washing habits, bought hundreds

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of outlet covers, got a baby monitor camera, learned infant CPR, and changed the way we went about normal daily living for the sake of our offspring. He was protected from germs, strangers, malnutrition, and any other possible element that threatened his safety. We even purchased a gun and took a safety course. As a parent, you never give thought to the possibility of some sort of fictitious monster hiding under your child's bed. There are, of course, other types of "monsters." The real kind of monsters like disease, child abduction, bullies at school, reckless drivers in the neighborhood. Of course, like all children, our child was afraid of the dark, afraid of the monster that only spies on you when your parents aren't around. It was not uncommon for my wife or me to make multiple trips to his crib,

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reassuring him that "Monsters are not real." As a parent, I dismissed his fear of a monster as a fear of the unknown or maybe he just wanted to be near his mom and dad, or maybe he was just watching too much TV. Grownups try to rationalize our understanding of the world we live in. For example, the reason there are so many movies about a boogie-man is because they make money in the box office. As an adult, we keep constant watch for real dangers in the world. "Son, buckle your seat belt," "Son, wear your helmet when you ride your bike," "Brush your teeth. Oral hygiene used to be a common killer." Parents are constantly overly cautious. Once you have kids, you wake at the slightest sound. A small turn of my bedroom's door knob is enough to bring me to full consciousness.

Long after all our kids left the nest and my wife and I retired, new fears arose in us. We still have the alarm system, but since there has never been a break in, we don't always set the alarm. We still have the gun, locked up in a safe and unloaded. We still sleep with a bat next to the bed. But now I am much older. I don't hear as well as I did in the past, and the bat really serves no purpose since it would take me about 4 minutes to swing it. If we had to dial 911, we would first have to fumble with the phone and search for the right buttons to press. Time goes by faster the older you get but in many ways, life slows down. We read stories in the paper about criminals who target the elderly. Would I still be able to arise to the challenge of an intruder?

One night I awoke to an unusual sound. The sound was very close to me. I could feel something distant, yet familiar. It was the fear of something supernatural. The monster finally came. It took my wife in her sleep. And I was filled with the same fear I felt as a boy - the monster had been here all along. The doctor told me that she just died of old age and natural causes and explained that the noise that woke me was "Cheyne-Stokes." Doctors don't believe in monsters like children do. Monsters are real. Growing up, I became less and less cautious of the monster. Aging, I became more and more concerned with tangible monsters like infection and fraud. I had lost all regard for the monster hiding on the ceiling and hovering on your bedsheet. No one has any regard for it, until it enters you. When it leaves the body, it takes the human with it. I witnessed it, when the monster took my wife, the monster that used to scare me as a boy.