



The Boy Who Killed Demons: A Novel

By Dave Zeltserman

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From the ALA Best Horror Award nominee, the terrifying novel about the demons next door...and down the street...and in the classroom.

“My name’s Henry Dudlow. I’m fifteen and a half. And I’m cursed. Or damned. Take your pick. The reason? I see demons.” In dreary Newton, MA, nothing ever happens?at least not until Hendry Dudlow turns thirteen and notices that his neighbor has become decidedly . . . different. While everyone else seems to think Mr. Hanley is just another balding man with a beer belly, Henry can see what the real Mr. Hanley is: a gruesome, bilious, rage-filled demon. Suddenly Henry begins to see demons lurking everywhere, and his quiet life in Newton is transformed. Instead of seeing his friends or the lovely Sally Freeman, Henry must translate an ancient text and hunt down the demonic killers of a gaggle of innocent children. In the meantime, his grades are getting worse, his parents are catching on to his lies, and there's no one he can tell about the horrors going on around him. A terrifying thriller with flashes of humor and great verve, *The Boy Who Killed Demons* is Dave Zeltserman’s most accomplished and entertaining horror novel yet, now available in paperback.

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Editorial Review

Review

"The sympathy that Zeltserman invokes on behalf of Henry is heartbreaking, and readers will fully believe in both the madness and the greatness of his tragic young hero." --"Publishers Weekly (starred review)"

"Humor outweighs the horror in this amusing look at a 15-year-old saving the world . . . Zeltserman manages the voice of a teenager deftly, and the adolescent angst rings true. The demons are almost background to a tale about growing up." --"Kirkus Reviews "

"The sympathy that Zeltserman invokes on behalf of Henry is heartbreaking, and readers will fully believe in both the madness and the greatness of his tragic young hero." --"Publishers Weekly (starred review)"

About the Author

Dave Zeltserman is the author of ten horror and crime novels, including *Monster*, a Booklist Top 10 Horror Fiction selection; *The Caretaker of Lorne Field*, shortlisted by the American Library Association for best horror novel of 2010; and *A Killer's Essence*. He lives in the Boston area.

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ALSO BY DAVE ZELTSEMAN

Monster

A Killer's Essence

The Caretaker of Lorne Field

Outsourced

Killer

Small Crimes

Pariah

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To Benjamin Del Cid

Tuesday, August 23rd 7:10 PM

MY NAME'S HENRY DUDLOW. I'M FIFTEEN AND A HALF, AND I'M cursed. Or damned. Take your pick.

The reason? I see demons.

Now don't get me wrong—it's not like I see demons lurking in the shadows or hiding under my bed or in my closet or anything like that. But I still see them. There are people out there who—well, you might see them

and think they're normal, just everyday people; but when *I* see them I see them for what they really are: demons. And I don't mean this in the figurative sense (I sometimes get *literal* and *figurative* mixed up, so I made sure to look up the definitions), so it's not like I see certain people as innately evil and think of them as demons. The ones I see as demons are evil alright, but they're also honest-to-God demons (or I guess honest-to-Satan): flaming red skin, yellow eyes, horns, grotesque faces with twisted misshapen noses, pit bull-like jaws filled with glistening jagged teeth, thick talon-like claws where there ought to be hands, the whole nine yards. They might be wearing suits, or a pair of Bermuda shorts and a T-shirt, or if they're masquerading as a girl or a woman, a dress or possibly a skirt and blouse. I've even seen one once in a two-piece bikini. But underneath all that they're demons. It's just that most people can't see them as they really are. Maybe nobody can, other than me. I hope that's not true, though—I really hope there are others out there who also see them the way I do.

You're probably thinking I'm mentally ill, that all this is nothing but the ravings of a crazy mind. I thought so, too—at first. I was two months past my thirteenth birthday when I saw my first demon—Mr. Hanley from three doors down the street—and I was convinced that something had to be seriously wrong with me. Mr. Hanley has lived on our street my whole life, and before that day I saw him the same way everyone else did: a middle-aged man with fat legs and arms, heavy jowls, a huge bald spot, and a beer belly that would always be peeking out from the bottom of an undershirt on hot summer days. He was just this guy in the neighborhood who would always nod and smile pleasantly and go about his business. I had no reason to think about him as anything unnatural—I had no reason to think about him at all. But a little less than two and a half years ago I saw him for the first time as . . . well, as an inhuman creature. Ever since, that's the only way I've ever seen him. And others too. Twenty-three others, to be precise.

In case you're thinking drugs or alcohol played a part—I can tell you that they didn't. I've never touched any of that stuff, other than a few sips of my mom's wine at dinner when she'd let me. And I'm not crazy, either. I know I'm not, even though I tried hard to convince myself that I was after my first demon sighting. Would a crazy person even think they're crazy? I don't know, but I did think something was seriously wrong with me that day and for months afterward.

If I'd suffered some sort of head injury or had experienced a recent traumatic episode, it would've made things so much easier. That could've explained why I was seeing demons, and at least I would've been satisfied that I was off in the head and that I wasn't cursed. But nothing like that had ever happened. That day was like any other day. I was riding my bike to school and was approaching Mr. Hanley's house when he walked out his side door to pick up his newspaper, wearing his usual morning outfit—a bathrobe and slippers. He started to nod to me in his pleasant way, but froze when he saw my reaction. I don't know if he knew for sure what I'd seen, but he was suspicious about it. For just a fraction of a second, his expression was transformed into something both malicious and ferocious—whatever it was, it wasn't anything human. He must've caught himself, though, because just as quickly he was back to his mask of smiling amiability. What I did next was pedal as fast as I could to get away from him.

That flash of rage and monstrosity that came over his demon face should've been enough to convince me that what I saw was real, but instead I continued on to school thinking I must've gone crazy. In class I tortured myself with thoughts like that. No one else at school looked like demons—not that day and not since—so I tried to convince myself that I only imagined what I saw, but the word *schizophrenia* kept pushing its way into my head. I was only thirteen and I didn't know what schizophrenia really was, but I couldn't pay any attention to what my teachers were saying—I wanted to get back on my bike, get onto the computer, and find out if I was suffering some sort of textbook case of schizophrenia. If not, I'd have to figure out what mental illness I *did* have.

Later that day I read enough about schizophrenia on the Internet to convince me that that wasn't what I had.

According to what I read schizophrenia developed slowly, over months, sometimes even years, and the people that had it had trouble sleeping and concentrating, were withdrawn and isolated. None of that described what my life had been like before I saw Mr. Hanley as a demon. Before seeing demons (BSD), I was like any other normal kid. I had friends, played little league baseball, kicked ass in Guitar Hero, and never had trouble sleeping. I still have a few friends—or at least I go through the pretense of having a few of them to keep my parents off my back—but I'm way more anxious and withdrawn than I was in my old, idyllic life. In those early days I didn't completely dismiss the idea that I was suffering from schizophrenia, but I didn't think it likely.

After reading every blog post and article about schizophrenia, I started to research delusions, trying to learn whatever I could about the disorder, which was when I came across the phenomenon of malperceptions. That's where some people see faces transform into a monster. Even back then, my gut instinct was telling me that this wasn't what I'd experienced, but I still had to consider it as a possibility.

I heard my dad come home a half hour ago, and my mom less than five minutes ago, and from the smell of it she brought home Indian takeout, though it could be Thai. Sometimes I get the smell of their curry dishes mixed up. If I get a chance, I'll write another journal entry later tonight—I want to explain how exactly I know that these are really demons I'm seeing. I'll also write about Clifton Gibson. How that would've cinched the deal for me by itself even if it wasn't for the dogs.

I haven't told anyone about the demons. I can't afford to—not my parents, not anyone. If I told my parents, they'd either have me institutionalized, or they'd drug me up with so many antipsychotics that I wouldn't be able to do what I had to. And if I told anyone else, word might get back to my parents—or worse, to the demons themselves. It's bad enough that Mr. Hanley is already suspicious. I know I have to be careful, which is why I'm writing this journal old school using a notebook and pen. If I wrote this on the computer, a demon might be able to hack into my Mac, and I can't take that risk. All of this might sound paranoid, and maybe it is, but who can blame me?

If something happens to me, I have to hope that this journal finds its way into the hands of someone open-minded enough to believe that what I'm writing here is true, or at least plausible enough to take seriously. And maybe if what happens to me is bizarre enough, whoever finds this will decide to investigate. If I'm dead, someone out there has to be looking into these demons.

My mom's yelling again for me to get downstairs for dinner. I better do it before she comes up here. More later.

Wednesday, August 24th 2:05 AM

AS I SUSPECTED, MY MOM BROUGHT HOME INDIAN TAKEOUT. ASD (After Seeing Demons) I became a vegetarian—to the great annoyance of my parents—so tonight my mom brought me a vegetable korma dish. It wasn't so much the sight of Mr. Hanley as a demon that turned me off meat, although I'm sure that was part of it, but more that when I was researching the different mental illnesses and brain diseases I thought I might be suffering, I read about Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease, which is the human form of mad cow disease. In my mind I knew then that I didn't have enough of the symptoms, but it still turned me off to eating meat and I haven't touched it to this day.

I should explain more about myself and my parents. We live in Newton, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston. Newton's a wealthy area, although not as wealthy as most people around here think. There are towns near Boston that are wealthier, but that's beside the point. Not only do we live in Newton, but we live in a village of Newton called *Waban* which actually is every bit as wealthy as people think. Very exclusive, very snobby, and yes, the people here do act as if they're special and entitled simply because they have a Waban address,

but again, that's besides the point. BSD I probably acted the exact same way even if I was only a pampered and somewhat spoiled kid who didn't know any better, but ASD my perspective on things changed dramatically. I now see the bigger picture. Wealth and material possessions don't mean spit in the larger scheme of things, and they haven't held any importance to me since that first demon sighting. Wherever I live or whatever possessions I own no longer matter to me. My only concern now are the demons living among us and what to do about them. The only reason I care about money ASD is so I can buy what I need to in order to deal with them.

Getting back to my parents, I don't know whether they're rich, but they're certainly well-off. They're both these high-powered, driven types—my dad's an attorney for a high-powered law firm that helps companies find legal ways to get around environmental laws, and my mom's a high-powered marketing executive for a consumer products company that makes mostly worthless junk—cheap medical equipment, toys that no one wants, that kind of thing. I suspect that my mom and dad make very good salaries, although probably not nearly as much as they wished.

They also care a lot about appearances—especially their own. Every morning they each spend a minimum of forty-five minutes in their individual bathrooms. They're in there tweezing and snipping and doing whatever else they have to do to get themselves perfect, so when they leave the house each day their hair is immaculate—not just on top of their heads but their eyebrows also. My mom's lipstick is applied with the precision of a neurosurgeon, and my dad's face is expertly shaved with just the right dash of cologne splashed on and not a single nose hair visible. Genetically, they both lucked out. Both of them are well-proportioned and got long legs and narrow waists and thick heads of hair, with my dad a few inches over six feet tall, and my mom also on the tall side, around five foot nine. Being purely objective, they're both superficially good-looking—or at least my dad is. My mom used to be, but she's been losing the battle with middle age of late, and her Botox treatments and her near manic hysteria to work out each day in a futile attempt to keep herself toned and slender has left her looking mostly freakish and bony. It's sad when I look at pictures of her from just five or six years ago and see what her desperation to stay young has driven her to.

I'm an only child. My mom took time off from her career when she was thirty-four to have me, and I guess she didn't want to take off any additional time to have other kids. Or maybe she was afraid of what it would do to her body—that she'd get permanently fat if she had more than one kid. Or maybe she didn't want to have to convert her yoga room back into a bedroom if they gave me a sister or brother, or give up the bedroom that they'd made into a home theater, or lose their guest room, even though I don't remember them ever having a guest stay overnight. But none of this really matters. I'm fine being an only child, and BSD, they were pretty happy with me. ASD, though, is a different story. Things changed quickly after my first sighting.

As you can probably guess, my schoolwork slipped pretty badly once I started seeing demons. It's hard to concentrate on school when you're worried that (A) you might be mentally ill or suffering some rare brain disorder, or that (B) the demons are real and there's a reason why you were the one chosen to see them when nobody else can, and if it's (B), then there's something far greater than yourself at stake. Given how high-achieving my parents are, it did not sit well with them that my school work slipped badly, and even worse, that I went from being a well-adjusted extroverted kid who was socially active and fit in nicely with the rest of the neighborhood (and generally didn't make a fuss) to an unhappy, sullen loner.

No, my parents were not happy. It didn't help either that my personal hygiene and grooming suffered ASD and that I quickly went from wholesome to grungy-looking and more than a little distasteful in their eyes in the span of a few weeks. Nor did it help that I transformed quickly from a cute thirteen year-old to a gangly-looking teenager. Physically I take after both my parents, although maybe my mom more than my dad. After a six-inch growth spurt I'm now as tall as my mom, at least when she's not wearing high heels. I've got that

same lean body type they both have, except on me it looks gawky and awkward, at least for now. Both my parents have these long faces with dimples (although my mom mostly lost her dimples thanks to her Botox treatments) and well-chiseled features and straight, classic Greek noses. Like them, my face is on the longish side, but I don't have any dimples. My lips look too big, my chin too weak, and my nose too large. It's more of an aquiline type (I suspect my mom must've had a nose job when she was younger, but if she did she would never admit it to me).

So given my plunging grades, my anti-social behavior, my lack of attention to my grooming and cleaning habits, and my generally more awkward appearance, my parents were not at all happy, and they came close to sending me to a therapist, or possibly even a psychiatrist, but fortunately I caught on to that and was able to make the necessary changes to keep that from happening.

My parents don't know what to make of me anymore. I went from perfect suburban child to bitter disappointment to now a mixed bag. It took me six months ASD to fully research all the mental illnesses and brain disorders and convince myself that I wasn't suffering from any of them, and that Mr. Hanley and the others I saw are actual demons. By the time that happened, my parents had completely cut me off as far as giving me an allowance or any money at all, probably because they were convinced I was buying drugs. I needed money to investigate these demons, but I didn't want to be beholden to my parents, so I started shoveling snow that first winter, and I used the money I earned to buy a secondhand lawnmower, so I could mow lawns that next summer.

All this left my parents even more confused. When you live in a rich, pampered neighborhood like Waban you don't find too many kids shoveling snow or mowing lawns to earn money, and my parents were embarrassed by my doing this, though I could tell that they were somewhat proud of my industriousness. Then, in the middle of ninth grade, I started digging into math as if I were a demon myself. Mostly probability and topology theory, but I had a lot of ground to cover before I could understand the concepts in those books. The end result was that I went from a D+ to a solid A in math, with my teacher telling my parents how remarkable my turnaround was, and how I had a real aptitude for the subject. And then, at the beginning of this summer I started studying German on my own, which really confused my parents. My dad is overall happy that I'm learning a new language—though he has no idea why I picked German—while my mom is suspicious. She hasn't voiced these suspicions directly, but she's dropped hints about them while trying to ferret out my sudden interest in that language. I have a sneaking suspicion that she's afraid I might be on my way to becoming a neo-Nazi, or something similarly bizarre.

Why did I suddenly become so interested in probability theory and topology? Because I realized that I needed to better understand how many of these demons there are out there, and where more of them might be showing up. I had to try to predict these numbers from different sample sizes, and to do that, I needed to understand things like Poisson distributions, and other such esoteric concepts I'd never heard of previously. My interest in German was also based on need. At the beginning of the summer, I'd gotten my hands on a copy of *Daemonologie*, by the eighteenth century German occultist Claus Schweikert. At first I thought I'd use one of the online translation services, but they turned out to be too expensive—and anyway, I'd lose important nuances. Next, I had the bright idea of finding someone who knew German at a local nursing home and convince this total stranger to read me the book in English. I did find an eighty-seven year-old who seemed to have his mental faculties and also seemed interested, but when I showed him the book he waved his liver-spotted hand in a gesture of disgust and asked why a nice boy like me would like something like that read to him. After that I decided it would be best if I just taught myself German, so that's what I've been doing. I'm about a third of the way through translating *Daemonologie*—so far the book is proving to be a disappointment. I suspect Schweikert was either a quack or mentally unbalanced, but I'll give it some more time.

Between bites of Lamb Vindaloo, my dad tried to give me a pep talk.

“Henry,” he said, his eyebrows severely knotted to impress on me how serious he was, “your mom and I are very pleased with some of the initiatives you’ve been taking of late. The way you bounced back in math last year was impressive, as is the continued interest that you’ve been showing in it. We’re also very impressed with how you decided on your own to learn a foreign language.”

“Thank you for these kind words, Sir.”

He was annoyed by that, I could tell, since he wasn’t completely sure if I was being sarcastic or genuine, but it didn’t deter him. I wasn’t being flippant, at least not entirely. Over the last year and a half I’d gotten into the habit of addressing him as *Sir* and my mom as *Ma’am*. I’m not sure exactly why I started doing it, but it’s become a way to distance myself from them. Maybe it’s my way of making it easier for them to deal with what happens if the demons ever discover me.

My dad’s eyes narrowed as he stared at me, which made his carefully groomed eyebrows bunch up even more. It looked to me that they could use some additional trimming, but I kept that to myself. He took another bite of his dinner and chewed it slowly before continuing with his pep talk.

“You’re going to be starting tenth grade in a couple of weeks,” he said, as he pointed his fork at me for emphasis. “I know you hit a, um, rough patch, a couple of years ago, but this new interest in math is good, as well taking the initiative to teach yourself German, which has really paid off in more ways than simply learning another language. I’ve noticed over the last few months the improvement in your overall vocabulary, and your mom has also. We’d like to see this recovery of yours continue. This is important, Henry. Tenth grade is when things really start mattering, and you can make up for the last two years by making a real effort this year. You need to do this so that you can get into the right college, and you need to show this same interest in all of your subjects. And your social skills also. Sports, too. You showed a lot of promise when you played little league. Your coach agreed with me. I think it would be a good idea if you tried out for the junior varsity team. What do you say?”

I nodded subserviently. I wouldn’t have time to play baseball, or for any other high school activity. Not with having to focus my energies on demons. But baseball was a Spring sport and a long way off. It wasn’t worth disappointing him now. That could wait.

His eyes stayed narrowed as he tried to read my expression for my true intentions, but in the end he decided to give me the benefit of the doubt. “Good,” he said, nodding slowly. “We really are happy with the improvements you’ve made. I’d still like to know the reason for your earlier setback, and maybe someday you’ll be willing to tell us what triggered it, but we want you to focus on the future, so we’ve decided to pay you a weekly allowance again. Fifty dollars, which should be enough for you to stop your snow shoveling and lawn maintenance business, which was certainly admirable in its own right. But this is an important time in your life and you need to concentrate your efforts on your school work and other social activities.”

I nodded affirmatively, though I knew I wasn’t about to quit my businesses. I couldn’t allow myself to be reliant on my parents and their money. What I was doing was too important.

A look of relief softened my dad’s chiseled features, and he smiled in a relaxed sort of way. “So Henry, why the sudden interest in German?”

“I’m thinking of majoring in psychology in college, and thought it would be good to be able to read Freud in his original writings.”

Of course this was an outright lie, but I wasn't about to tell him that I was studying German because I needed to be able to translate an eighteenth-century book on demonology. Nor was I going to inform him that I had no plans to go to college. How could I, with what I was going to have to do? Fortunately, he mostly accepted my lie, though out of the corner of my eye I could see my mom making a sour face, at least as much as the Botox injections allowed her to. But she wasn't about to accuse me right then of having other motives for teaching myself German, and she caught herself before my dad could look at her.

"Sir," I said, "given all of my improvements *of late*, can we reconsider having a dog?"

From my peripheral vision I could see my mom preparing herself to complain about what a dog would do to her carpeting, but she closed her mouth and let my dad handle the dirty business. He frowned in an apologetic sort of way, saying, "Henry, it just wouldn't make sense for us to get a dog right now. Not with you going off to college in three years. Your mom and I would be stuck with it."

"I could take the dog to college with me."

He started to dismiss the idea, but instead left it open, telling me that we could revisit the subject during Christmas break, which was kind of a dirty trick to get more leverage on me. I guess I've always wanted a dog, and they've always had their excuses for why we couldn't get one, but now I had new reasons.

I had promised in my last entry to talk about dogs and demons, and also about Clifton Gibson, but it's late now and I'm tired. After dinner I put another four hours into my translating of *Daemonologie*, which convinced me even further that the book was worthless, although I haven't quite reached the point where I'm willing to toss it. Close, but not quite there. After I quit for the night I felt like I needed to watch *Spider-Man*, which is what I always watch when I'm feeling like my situation is hopeless. I think I've watched it over 100 times ASD. I know it's corny, but I can relate to the whole thing about how 'with great power comes great responsibility.' Watching that movie helps keep me going.

It's almost three o'clock. I'm yawning and having trouble keeping my eyes open, and I have a busy day ahead tomorrow. When I write my next entry, I'll talk about dogs and Clifton Gibson. Promise.

Wednesday, August 24th 10:22 AM

MY PARENTS MUST'VE LEFT FOR WORK AT LEAST THREE HOURS AGO, and thank God they didn't feel the need to give me a parting lecture about staying up late to watch movies, probably because they knew I'd spent a good part of last night with my German self-studies. Right now I'm writing this journal entry sitting in my bathrobe at the table in their top-of-the-line stainless steel chef's kitchen while drinking a triple espresso made with their eight hundred dollar Italian espresso machine. One of the perks of living in a McMansion in the middle of Waban, Massachusetts. Eight-hundred-dollar espresso machines. It doesn't quite make up for my lot in life being fated to deal with demons but at least it's something.

Even after seven hours of sleep and a triple espresso, my head's still too wonky to think straight, kind of like my brain's wrapped in a wool sock. I shouldn't have gone to bed so late, not with all the stuff I have to do today. Hopefully a couple of chocolate crullers from Dunkin' Donuts will help knock some of the fuzziness off. I should have time to ride my bike there later.

I promised last night to write about dogs and demons. The short answer: dogs don't like demons very much or at least they don't like Mr. Hanley. And when I say they don't like him, I mean they're terrified of him. I haven't been able to witness him crossing paths with a dog, though one day I will. But I *have* seen the way they act when they get near his house. They're too terrified to growl or snarl or even show their teeth instead they just want to get as far away from his house as fast as they can. I have my theories on why this is. A big

part of it has to be that they must sense something about him, or they can pick up an odor that freaks them out. If I had a dog I could perform some tests on him, like blindfolding him or overloading his olfactory senses with another odor to see if he still behaved the same. But I have other reasons.

I didn't make the dog-demon connection right away. It really didn't happen until six months ASD. Before then I was a wreck. I avoided any further Mr. Hanley sightings, afraid of what I might see, and was well along the way to convincing myself that something was seriously wrong with me, and the only thing that kept me from doing that was I couldn't find any disorder that looked like a good enough match. What helped me finally accept that Mr. Hanley was an actual demon was when I saw his picture in the local paper. I doubt he even knew his picture had been taken. He was in the background carrying an odd-looking package wrapped in white paper, like he had gotten it from the butcher's shop, except it looked too big and cumbersome to be steaks, more like it would have to be a small side of beef. When I saw him in the photo it was as a heavysset square-faced balding man and not as a demon. That made me want to see him again, badly, so I camped out and hid in some bushes across the street where he wouldn't be able to see me. I couldn't camp out like that all the time, only an hour here and there so my parents and nobody else would know what I was up to, and because of that it took me three days before I saw him again. When I did he was still a demon, but this time I brought my iPhone with me, and guess what? Through the viewfinder he was the same chunky and balding Mr. Hanley that I used to see BSD. Somehow this didn't surprise me. I took several pictures and they all showed him as a human and not as a demon.

So where do dogs and demons come into all this? While I was camped out, I saw how every time a dog approached Mr. Hanley's house, they acted the same. They'd start shaking like crazy, their tails going straight between their hind legs, and they'd dig in and fight against the leash with everything they had to keep from being led past that house. Some owners would give in and turn around and their dogs would make these awful wheezing strangled noises as they fought against their leashes trying to race away in a blind panic. Others, especially those owners with smaller dogs, would just about pull their dogs past the house, but once they were beyond Hanley's property they'd also struggle to put some serious distance between themselves and that house. In none of these cases was Hanley actually outside, so I knew that these dogs weren't reacting to the sight of him, but rather to a smell or something else that they sensed. Whatever it was, it left them terrified.

I only saw seven different owners try to walk their dogs past that house, which wasn't a lot, given that I was camped out for over eight hours during my three-day surveillance mission. None of these people were from the neighborhood—I'm guessing that anyone living nearby with a dog must've learned long ago to avoid Hanley's house. Watching this play out also made me think about the dogs that have gone missing in our neighborhood over the years. The Goldsteins' black lab that disappeared from their fenced-in backyard. The Michelsons' old Saint Bernard that used to lay like a lump on their front doorstep. The Andersons' overstuffed English Bulldog. And there were others too. There was talk for a while how there must be coyotes living on a nearby wooded golf course, but nobody ever saw or heard any coyotes, and if it was coyotes then the neighborhood cats would've been disappearing also. The other thing is that all the dogs that disappeared were big dogs. None of the yapping little terriers in the neighborhood ever went missing. When I thought of that, I immediately thought of the large package wrapped in white paper that Mr. Hanley was carrying in that photo.

So yeah, I want a dog. Worrying about how to protect the world from demons is a lonely life, and it would be nice to have some companionship. More than that, I want to be able to do the experiments I mentioned earlier, but also I want to see how a dog would react when brought face to face with Mr. Hanley and other demons. It couldn't be just any dog, it would have to be a special one. Maybe a bull terrier. I've read about them, and I think that breed would be perfect. Strong, fearless, probably even able to hold its own against a demon. Somehow I don't think that breed would act the same way as these other dogs did. I think a bull

terrier would be able to look a demon in the eye, and instead of wanting to run away would want to rip its ugly flaming red throat out. At least I hope so.

So that's the scoop between dogs and demons. I need to do more experiments and tests, but I've seen enough to be convinced that dogs aren't fooled by these demons. They either sense or smell what they are, and one of these days I'll know whether they also *see* them for what they are.

I also promised to write about Clifton Gibson, and yeah, he's the same Clifton Gibson you've been reading about the last two years. The one who was found in a warehouse in Brooklyn with dozens of cages filled with little kids, none of them older than four. The papers didn't give much in the way of detail, but the charges were lengthy, with kidnapping, illegal imprisonment, torture, mutilations, performing depraved acts on children: the list goes on and on. The pictures they showed of Gibson in the papers and on TV had him as this creepy-looking guy. Tall, bald, with these dead eyes. Kind of like a human snake. The story broke seven months ASD and when I first saw his photo on TV I felt this certainty about him that I couldn't explain. After that I became obsessed with reading everything I could about him, and I searched every website and message board that mentioned him. There were a lot of rumors about nearby missing children and what he must've done to them, and there were other rumors about the children they found.

Nobody in the police or DA's office would talk about what was done to the children they rescued. It was a privacy issue. But you had the charges filed against Gibson, and you had all the rumors, and you knew the reality had to be bad. The one rumor I couldn't shake was that he had sewn their eyelids and lips closed.

When the trial started I took a train to New York so I could get into the courtroom. My parents had no idea. I just left the house early that morning and left them a note about how I had a heavy day of mowing lawns ahead of me, and that I'd be eating dinner at Wesley Neuberger's house and would be home late. Wesley is one of the handful of friends I still stay in contact with to keep my parents off my back, and I'd worked it out with him ahead of time to cover for me. After I was out of the house, I rode my bike to a neighboring town, Needham, took the train to South Station, and from there got on the Acela train to New York and made it to Penn Station by eleven o'clock. It took me another hour to get to the Kings County Courthouse in Brooklyn where the trial was being held, and as you know if you caught any of the news clips a year ago, it was a complete circus with the media and mobs of angry local residents fighting to get in and lines of police keeping all of us at bay.

I squeezed my way through this mob and one of the police officers gave me a stony stare and told me to beat it. I lied to him and told him that a four-year-old cousin of mine was one of Gibson's victims. ASD I'd gotten very good at lying—I had to in order to keep my parents in the dark as to what I was doing, and I must've lied convincingly enough to this police officer, because instead of dismissing me for being full of shit, like he probably wanted to, his eyes wavered a bit, and although he now had a hard smirk on his face, he asked me the name of my cousin.

This is where I got lucky. Most of the stuff I read online about Gibson seemed like total BS, but there was one blog that felt more reliable, and I threw out one of the names I'd seen listed there.

"I need to see him," I said. "After what he did to my cousin, I don't think I'll ever be able to sleep again at night if I don't."

That did it. Again, I'd learned with a lot of practice with my parents how to be a convincing liar, but I hit the jackpot with the name I gave him. I could see it in that police officer's eyes after he checked the name against a list he had.

"You'll behave yourself?" he asked.

“Yeah, I promise. I just need to see him. Even if it’s just for one minute.”

He studied me carefully for a long ten-count, then nodded. “You wait here,” he said. “I’ll see what I can do.”

He left, another cop took his place, and the crowd pushed hard behind me making it difficult to breathe. The world started to grow red on me, and I had a moment where I thought I was going to pass out, but eventually the cop came back and led me through the police line.

“One minute,” he told me.

I nodded, still dizzy from the crowd nearly suffocating me moments earlier, my heart racing too much for me to say anything. He escorted me into the courthouse, and there a court officer took over. He gave me a stern lecture about what would happen if I made any noise inside the courtroom, and I nodded my acquiescence. Once he was satisfied he led me inside, and you can guess the rest. Yep, Clifton Gibson’s a demon. He was taller and thinner than Mr. Hanley, but he had that same flaming red skin and horns and claws and all the rest of those demon features. Even though I was expecting it, the whole thing still took my breath away. And the really crazy part was that he wasn’t the only demon in the courtroom—there were two others, both spectators. One of them turned my way, his expression puzzled as he looked at me. At that point I figured I’d better get out of there, and I indicated to the court officer that I’d seen enough. He walked me out of the court, and after that I was moving fast down the hallway and out of the building. I had a funny feeling as I was squeezing my way through the crowd, and sure enough, after I had gotten out of that scene I turned to see that the demon from the courtroom was trying to push his way through the crowd also, but not having much luck given his larger bulk. He had followed me and was after me. I ran then.

I made a mental note to myself after that that I had to be more careful when looking at demons. I wasn’t expecting other demons in that courtroom, but it was still no excuse to let down my guard. They’re sly and clever and have an innate sense of when they’ve been recognized. If I make a mistake like that again, it could be the end for me.

It’s a quarter to eleven, and I have to get going if I want to get those Dunkin’ Donut crullers. I have a busy day planned. First up: I have to mow Mr. Hanley’s yard. I’ll explain in my next journal entry how that came about.

Auf wiedersehen for now.

Wednesday, August 24th 12:18 PM

I WASN’T PLANNING ON WRITING ANOTHER JOURNAL ENTRY until later tonight, but I’m still shaking from what went down minutes ago at that demon’s house. I need to get this on paper now while the details are fresh in my mind. If I save this for later I might leave out important details, or worse, add in some exaggerations, and what happened was bizarre enough without doing that.

Let me explain first why I’ve been mowing Hanley’s yard, although you probably can guess. After he found out I was mowing other lawns in the neighborhood, Hanley made a point of watching for me so he could barrel out of his house and wave me over to offer me the job. I think he wanted to test me, see how I’d react, but he probably also wanted to keep an eye on me so that he could decide whether I suspected anything. What was I going to do? Turn him down? That would be the same as telling him to his face that I knew what he was. Instead I quoted him a rate, adding in a fifteen dollar demon surcharge. He gaveme a little demon snarl, as if he suspected that I had inflated my price for him, but he accepted my price, and for the last year I’ve mowed his lawn every week during the summer.

Today, like every day that I've mowed his lawn, he watched me through his kitchen window while I tried to act as if I wasn't noticing, only allowing myself to catch *accidental* glimpses of him. During the forty minutes I was there I don't think he moved once, probably not even to blink (do demons blink? I don't think so), but that wasn't anything unusual. He always just sat watching me through the window like some sort of demon Buddha with his demon muzzle set in a scowl. The deal we have is for him to mail me my payment each month, but today as I was finishing up he came out his side door and tried waving me over. I pretended I was too wrapped up in what I was doing to notice.

"Henry, boy, come over here. Let me pay you."

I looked up then and tried to act surprised that he was there. "I didn't know you were home," I lied, probably pretty badly. "Just mail me a check like you always do."

"You can save me a stamp," he said in his flat demon growl. Just as I could now see them as demons, I could also hear them as such, and they don't sound anything like humans. Their voices have a deep, unnatural sound with far too much bass echoing in it, like they're inside an echo chamber with all these hisses and snarls mixed in.

I tried to smile sympathetically and act as if he wasn't a demon. "I have another job after this one," I explained. "If I take a check from you now I'll probably lose it before I get home. Or it'll get too soaked through with my sweat for my bank to take it. I'll tell you what, why don't you deduct the cost of the stamp from your payment?"

From the way his jaw twisted I could guess he would've been smiling pleasantly if I could've seen him as a human, but all I could see was malevolence in his demon face and dead yellow eyes.

"You're sweating right now, Henry," he growled. "You could use something to drink. Come on in. I'll get you something."

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