

THE ETERNAL NIGHT

Incredibly, I found myself upstairs alone in the house at night. My father was away for work. And everyone else was sleeping. This might have been an opportunity. But I did not see it in such a positive light.

I had already been tossing and turning on my bed. I was more than a little restless tonight, and I had not been able to quiet down. I hated the fact that sleep had been denied to me. My fatigue only made my thoughts more dominant over my spirit. Everything that I considered became imbued with this spiritual form. Every decision for my future became a metaphysical puzzle for the ages. I couldn't get out of my bed and get a glass of water. That seemed like a great campaign through an endless desert. And I believed that my whole life depended on me getting to sleep at this moment.

I was the gatekeeper at the portal to another world. It was my responsibility to make sure that every soul was ready to cross to the other side. Why was I so unfortunate? I had enough to worry about. Would I ever make it to see morning? Why did others need my help to guide them through the thickets. Why couldn't they make their own way?

I wasn't counting sheep. That count would have taken me closer to dreams. My dilemma was just the opposite. Every image that I conjured up was so vivid that it was more difficult to quiet down.

Vague shapes were coming alive in the darkness. My stomach was getting tied up in knots. The seconds were ticking away at a tortuous pace. I could hear the timpani banging away. There was to be no rest for my wickedness.

I felt that I needed my quiet more than ever. But the world was clanging all around me. It was as if my face was leaning against the big clock in my mother's room. I could hear the mechanism banging away inside my head.

As I tried to turn back these harmful effects, the seconds seemed to divide in more infinitesimal units. I was further than ever from attaining sleep. I was lost on the winding staircases of time.

If I attempted to collect all these moments into one, it only made things feel more oppressive. I was slipping into a quagmire of my own making. If my visit to the river had infected me in such a threatening way, this had to be a lot worse. I was contemplating a calamity that had the potential to blow apart all of creation. I couldn't rely on my good will to see me through the crisis. My beliefs were being eroded.

This was hopeless. I couldn't step back from what was happening and find a moment of calm. Any alternative vantage point only added to the absurdity. I was watching myself fall into the abyss so that only created more trepidation. I needed to catch my breath. Every thought seemed like a rock tossed in my direction. I tried to duck. But it made contact. I fought to bounce back. I shook my head. There was this crazy ringing inside of me. I tried to get rid of the feeling. But it only became a deeper part of me.

There would be no tomorrow. There was a permanence to this night. Its reach was more extensive than my illness. I did what I could to attain a temporary balance. This wasn't like me. I would worry about things. Then I would make myself busy and forget about it. At night, this was difficult. I could hear a train whistle. Briefly, this took me back to my reality. Then I heard

the trailing echo. And the experience repeated itself over and over again. It told me that time was revolving around me, but it offered me no clear line to continue on.

Down deep, I knew that the disease had passed. But tonight I felt that the sickness continued to inhere inside of me. The more that I thought about its effects, the more that I could feel it again taking over my body. I was feeling weak. I began to wonder if my supposed recovery was only a dream from which I was gradually waking up. Now I faced the full effect of my realization.

I wanted to light a candle to see what was actually going on. But I was afraid of waking anyone. That only made my illusions seem more ever-present. It was hard to put my fear out of my mind. I actually believed that I was deathly ill. The light would show me how bad things were. I wasn't coughing, but I could feel my stomach tighten up. My breathing seemed tense.

How was this even possible?

They hadn't been able to treat my sickness with any medicine. They had depended on the body to establish a natural progression. But that only meant that the disease had lodged deep inside of me. I felt weak tonight. This was the germ's opportunity to reassert itself. How could I ever counteract its effects?

The fever reasserted itself. I was burning up. I had denied the fires of hell. And now they were doing their work on me. The relapse was unbelievable. I had not experienced something so draining when I was sick. Such immense pain should have knocked me out. Instead I was heading in and out of consciousness. Each return hit me in a more extreme fashion. My thoughts seemed to be encouraging the terror. And the suffering was becoming formidable.

I needed to stop this pain. I wanted to be given something to knock me out. I tried to hit my head against the pillow. But I had trouble moving. I lay there until a wave of calm passed over me. Then the same sequence played again.

I felt a cough shake me up. It was almost as if I was coughing out all my insides. The blood just flowed. I was thrown against the bed. But I didn't make a sound. Just as I braced myself, the jolt hit me again. It was leaving little time to recover. These aftershocks were entirely surprising. I had developed a strength to resist this kind of thing. But that power was being worn down.

If I could just call out for help, someone could do something to end this. They could call for the doctor. Anything to ease this torture.

Even if I made it through tonight, I was afraid that the same thing could happen again and again. When would it break my body apart so that there was nothing left? I wanted my cherished miracle to make all this cease. Had I been too haughty? I thought that I was special, I used my insight to challenge the rest of the world.

As I wrapped myself around the darkness, I was able to recognize the source of my relapse. There was a general weakness that remained in my body. I was remembering the worst of my illness. Combined with my worries, this allowed my imagination take over. I never thought that the nightmarish visions could take a solid form. But my mind had been transformed by my sickness. I had to make an effort just to make my conscious awareness stable. A little push, and I was returned to the wasteland.

Even though, I stopped feeling deathly ill, I was just as restless as I had been. This wasn't the same thing as waking from a bad dream. The physical effects were wearing off. But for the

time being, they had seemed as real as any malady that I had endured previously. This was about something more excessive than the power of the mind. The physical form was unavoidable. I hadn't seen objects fly mysteriously across the room. But I might as well have witnessed something as extraordinary.

The night was approaching total darkness. I couldn't soak up an ounce of light to guide me through the room. I could have been anywhere at this moment. I had the strangest sensation trying to moving my arms. Such was the confusion when I couldn't see a thing. I felt as if my body was becoming more and more invisible until it no longer existed..

I had been knocked down by a physical force that had been too great to resist. Now that power was expressing itself as a total absence. I was being denied access to the world. I was turning more and more into myself. I couldn't call on anyone since no one existed where I was now. This was way beyond nightmare. There were no images to manipulate.

What made the darkness so authoritarian was the absence of the spirit. I could not appeal to higher power to rescue me. I had used my imagination to engage the night. But that had only made me feel sick again. So the only way that I could get rid of my nausea was to neutralize my imagination. My worries had dissipated. But I now had little in my favor to beat back my discomfort.

I had a sinking feeling that I had done everything that I could to improve my situation and the was nothing more that could help. If I let this thought fester, it would end up taking me over. How else could I handle things? I couldn't dream myself out of this one. There were no lively images to distract me. I was in the heart of darkness.

I had done my utmost to make sense of my dilemma in universal terms. I had been hit by a terrible illness. It had drained my resources to combat its effects. So I my will had become worn down. Anyone else in my situation would have felt the same things as I did. Why did I take it all so personally? Why did my agony make me feel so isolated from everyone else?

I saw my collapse as part of a greater phenomenon. My demise was of a moral nature. Others might not take things so seriously. They would recognize the grave character of the disease, but they wouldn't take it as a sign of a deeper moral disorder. How could I think otherwise? I was already familiar with a sense of dread that had been reinforced by my religious belief. Even if I didn't indulge my desires, I nurtured my ego. My self-centeredness wanted some kind of reward for all its zeal. I welcomed the treacherous waters. I embraced the heat of the sun. What more would I have to do before I gave myself over completely to sensual pleasure.

My recovery had been characterized by an even more passionate embrace with the sun. How could I ever deny my metamorphosis? I wasn't a child of the sun, but the pagan whispers incited a well of deep joy within me. I had always resolved my struggles by throwing myself into physical work. The mind could not offer a complete solution for any problem. It could only sketch the outlines. I plunged into the furious activity of the world.

The absolute darkness was a reaction against the sparkling light of the sun. But the sun's radiance was a reflection of the light of the spirit. And that light burned even brighter. I used my experience in the sun to shore up my denial of the spirit. I lived the heat in and for itself. It was no longer a sign of another mode of existence. If darkness was the negation of that experience, then absolute darkness was a total affront to the spirit. I had turned my back on my faith. At the same time, I called out in the eternal night for some kind of rescue. I was inviting the demon's

way.

My religion had not been based on competing magics. It expressed its connection to the believer by using a doctrine that was based in reason. Even if faith itself was of a different character, reason led the believer to an enrichment of his faith. My physical experiences had become so overwhelming that I could not defend myself by the use of argument. I was espousing the unreasonable. Absolute darkness advanced madness!

I felt that it would only be a short while before I would feel completely helpless. I had tried to console myself to the fact that this was the nighttime. Things would make more sense in the daylight. I just felt that I would never reach dawn. This night was going to be endless. And the mantle of darkness would never lift. I had fought so hard to overcome the illness. I had cast out the negative influences that accompanied my recovery. But this crushing feeling had lingered. I was confronting the full impact of what had happened to me. I would never be able to interact with people again. I was so marked by the disease. I had made me a freak. On first glance, you couldn't see the changes. But they were there. They were deep. I would never be able to hide what had happened to me. People would shun me. They would point me out in a crowd. And they would mock me.

I had already felt out of place. But I had always been able to deal with my feelings. Now, my sense of security had been destroyed. If I felt terrible in public, my feelings were even worse at home during the night. All that discomfort was being magnified for me. I couldn't take a walk to make that frustration go away. It was nagging at the core of my being.

The smallest task was transformed into the ascent of the highest mountain. And I was too weak to put one foot in front of the other. I collapsed on the ground. I was waiting for some higher entity to hear my pleas. Only the vultures descended from on high. Was it too late to save myself?

Every attempt to right myself only made me submerge more. This was what it was like to drown. As I was getting pulled under, my lungs filled with water. It was too much to cough out. I felt as if my chest was going to explode. The treacherous currents were pulling me under.

I was undergoing a deep malaise of the soul. The experience hollowed me out completely. I was running away from myself. The illness was only one stage of the overall process. I had faced something disquieting about my nature. That only made my resistance lower. It was as if I wanted to hurt myself. I hated to think about things that way. I never saw myself as hating life. But I wanted to end this pain. This cycle of relapse and recovery was destroying me. I had been doing this all my life. I couldn't do it anymore.

My thoughts wouldn't allow me to get free, I had discovered something so dastardly about the universe. We were meant for this misery. No amount of energy on our part could free us from this aspect of our nature. I was slipping down. I couldn't grab hold of anything.

The hollow inside was making me physically ill. I wanted to vomit this nastiness out of my system. I was dizzy. Even resting in bed wasn't helping. It was that same vertigo that I had experienced after going to the river. The contrary currents were moving inside of me. I was being spun around inside of myself.

I reached for my head to try to give myself some balance. The delirium became much more severe. I could feel this force beating down on me. I wanted it to end. I needed an answer.

I wished that I could be more eloquent. Maybe my skill would rescue. But there was

nothing to help me out. If sleep was my only rescue, it was being denied to me. The refusal was brutal. Even if I escaped this night, I feared the return of the same kind of episode. I had fallen completely into this trap. This was now my way of life. My escape ended up being the very structure that reinforced the walls that held me prisoner.

I understood the foundation of my imprisonment. I was my own torturer. I had spent all my days devising these techniques to make me suffer. Now I was applying these methods against myself. I couldn't even cry out for help. I was the only person who really knew what was going on. And I would not offer myself the key to release me from this place.

There was a time when I had discovered a primal sympathy in nature. I could walk in fresh breeze and feel the energy pulse through my body. There had been something so uplifting about this sensation. And the more that I pursued this fantastic experience, the more that I was enlivened by this wondrous joy. It spoke to me of an eternal promise where I would always be able to enjoy the marvels of spring.

What had cut me off from this paradise? I wanted more. I felt a rivalry with the sun. It wasn't enough for it to sustain life around me. I wanted that heat to burn from the inside. My vanity became the most severe when we were by the waters. I could feel the stirring inside of me. It was volatile in nature. It dragged me down to the physical without any hope of transcendence. I felt delight in the immediacy. I didn't want to give up on its thrilling jolt.

I knew what I was risking. I could have avoided this occasion of wickedness. But my pride drove me on. I wanted to live in this world. I wanted to reap its benefits. I had been told to wait for my reward in heaven. But I could already taste the fruits of heaven. I let the warm rays of the sun penetrate deep inside of me. I kept wanting more. My father had called me in, but I begged to stay out longer. And that had been my undoing.

Before my nasty fall, I had it all figured out. I could taste the sweet nectar in small doses. But I would never succumb to its poison. I used the invitation to go to a higher place. That had not been enough for me. But my fainting spells emphasized how weak was my body. I didn't want to be a victim of my limitations. I didn't want to withdraw into a world of silence. The vibrancy of the sunny day was too much for me. It showed me another way. And I gave in completely to its temptation.

After my recovery, I recognized once and for all that there was no more room for me in the transcendent realm. I was forced to inhabit this world of constant turmoil. I was more susceptible to temptation and eventual disappointment. I had been cast out of the garden. I felt cheated. I had only wanted more of the goodness. Truly, I had become a rival to the sun god. What were the origins of this curse?

All my life, I had felt deprived of my nature. I could never find satisfaction in the pursuit of pleasure. I felt the need to withdraw from the whirlpool of life. I held on to my independence. But it didn't give me enough to sustain myself. I needed a stronger basis to assert myself.

In the teachings of the Church, I had found solace. But the lessons were always so harsh in their intent. I needed to soften their impact. I did what I could not to let this severity overcome me. I used my will to compensate for the excesses of my religion. I had seen it inspire cruelty in some of its teachers. I could not let this attitude overtake me.

I remember when the parish priest had tried to embarrass our family for our limited donations. He had no compassion for the poverty that we endured. He embarrassed us to feed

his own conceit. These shepherds had no desire to bring us closer to redemption. They were serving their own ego.

There was a side of the Church that I did not want to countenance. I could not abide with its rigidity. It made it more difficult for me to approach providence. In charting out on my own, I faced all the risks that buoyed the self on these choppy waters. I had already given in to my own pride. I wanted to be different than the hypocrites who assailed me. I had tried to remain strong. But the ways of the world were too strong. I didn't want to see myself as a sinner. I was again dealing with my corrupt nature. As much as I attempted to counteract the effects of evil, there was a part of me that was fascinated by the world. I was now suffering for my attraction for these physical delights.

I was like a bear who had just got in the honey pot. There was nothing that could stop me from indulging in these sweets. I never saw myself as so driven. I enjoyed eating. But I ate to survive. I liked to prepare food. But I didn't want to become a slave to my appetites. I was realizing that there was no half-way with our desires. That little taste was always enough to take us over the edge. If it didn't consume us in its positive form, then we would become overwhelmed by our self-denial. We would become gluttons to our own smug self-certainty.

I had learned how to feed off of my own attitude. I nurtured my ego by my disdain for others. I feared that they were jeering at me. But I had withdrawn so into myself that I couldn't be touched. From that vantage point, I looked down on others and reveled in my superiority. Now that I saw my own overindulgence, I seemed pathetic. In retaliation, the night was inflicting the cruelest punishment on me for my glaring offenses. How could I have surrendered to my most obscene tendencies?

If people knew what I was like, why would they ever want to help me? The night was darker than ever because my enemies had each turned it down a notch so its effects were permanent. There would never be a sun that could illuminate this forsaken country. This was to be my place of exile.

The more that I considered my fate, the more that I was convinced that I was giving myself an out. I kept retelling the story until I finally had the desired escape hatch. Why should I allow myself any respite? I had shown my nastiness. I didn't want to be forgiven. I could feel how I was turning my back on any form of deliverance. I didn't deserve the consideration that my retelling allowed me. There were to be no more appeals.

The sound of the door closing reverberated. This emphasized the final closing. Could I use the drama to twist out of my death sentence? I thought about the dreadful character of this decision. I was the judge effecting the execution. And the prisoner was begging for mercy.

It had been a terrible accident. Things had gotten out of control. I thought that I could claim an easy victory. But the baby's cries started to drive me crazy. I didn't know what I could do to control him. I wanted him to be quiet. I wanted to help. I just did something stupid. And my misdeeds led to more misdeeds. Finally, it was too late.

Could I let him go? I had felt the judgement go against me. I was in the same position to render a verdict. Would I be as definitive?

I was still a child. And I had to carry the weight of the world on my shoulders. What did I really know about justice? Would this terrible swift sword spare any of the children. I wanted the assassin to pass over me. I had been having the worst dreams. In them, he wanted to hurt

me. And now he had been caught. What could be done to end the suffering?

I felt that I was ready to make the sacrifice. I would accept my punishment. At the same time, I did not want to render such a strict verdict on others. Was this my saving grace? I would let myself walk. There was always time for repentance. I took my key and opened the cell door. I was letting myself off the hook.,

I had escaped the executioner, but I still felt the same. It would only be a postponement. I would wander around the yard in the faint light. Then the night would again descend. And I wouldn't be able to liberate myself from its spell.

The other prisoners despised me. They had seen me use the system to my advantage. I had become the warden. And I would not let them out of their misery. Why was I granting a special privilege to myself? If I found some kind of pleasure in this darkest of nights, then it was hardly serving as a deterrent to my future offenses. I was guilty through and through.

Tonight was only a premonition of what was to come. I couldn't face that future. I wanted it to end now. The knowledge alone was enough to rip me to shreds. Let the hungry wolves have their way with me!

I heard the dog bark. The wailing was interminable. This was all part of my vision. I could not close my eyes. It was happening inside of my head. If I had escaped the assassin, he was looking for another lover. The ritual in blood needed to take place, if not now, then sometime in the future. Who would he choose? My life depended on his decision. I could not make him go away without some agreement. I hated the terror that awaited. Others would feel even more mortified.

While the others slept, the reaper was pacing around trying to decide who he would visit. My night was hardly calm. But I could face the killer. Someone in this household was preparing to meet the maker in his dreams. And that would be a foreshadow of some future night that was full of endless sorrow. Who was the most ready to give himself so that the rest of us could live? I hated thinking of our lives in such stark terms.

If I could reach the dawn, I could let all of this go. But the night was interminable. And our house was full of this demonic presence. We could never be right. We had already been touched by restlessness. Tonight seemed to doom our struggle.

I was letting my fears interfere with my living. And I couldn't sleep. So these thoughts persisted. I was now living a nightmare. The demons had crawled out of their nocturnal abode and were haunting my conscious state. I realize that I sounded. But there was no other way to explain it. It had all started out as this vague impression of the future. And now it was taking shape in a more distinct fashion. These immense nightmares always had a way of wracking my brain. And now these monsters were spreading everywhere. It was an epidemic.

I could have dismissed all this nonsense if it didn't tell me something significant about my life. I understood that I already tended a fragile balance. My own health had been threatened for months. Although the overall distress was hardly contagious, I could sense a bad omen. Everything about the farm spoke of a more revealing picture of the world. This went beyond the obvious cycles of life. From the storms to the constant bubbling under of the chaotic, there was something ominous that seemed to track our every move. And there was no way to shake this horror. Tonight, I was facing all those fears at once.

What occasion had cause everything to surface at once? My improving health brought a

burden with it. At the same time, I felt that my condition had been no simple accident. And that same threat remained and had the potential to affect others. Everyone participated in the same tenuousness. That made a number of us want to escape. If we couldn't act out our restlessness, it would eat at us from the inside. I had experienced that eruption.

There were too many species competing for the same plot of land. The competition was hurting us all. It was like the lot of us crowded into one bedroom. It hardly leant itself to comfort. We felt torn by what was occurring. But we had learned to cope. So we spent much of our time just trying to hang on. And that style of survival gave us little leeway. We were waiting for the next disaster.

Due to my illness, I had a special view into what was happening. I felt fortunate to have been clued in. I wanted to wake everyone and share the news. Of course, they would look at me as if I was truly insane. What did I know? I had absented myself from the earth for so long. I had let my fever rot my brain. And this was the final step in my madness. I recognized that I would have to keep it all to myself.

A pioneer spirit had inspired the settlers. They had taken on the land. And it broke their backs. The winter was brutal. But they had survived. Through it all, the ghosts remained. They would not yield to the courage of the living. These phantom marauders were now playing havoc with my night. They would not let me sleep. They messing with my mind. And they wanted to chart the course for our future. I wanted to dispel their influence. This was the restless spirit that had touched the first visitors.

By the waters, I had felt myself released from the obligations of the earth. That only made things seem more desperate. All the repressed ideas were emerging. While everyone else slept soundly, I was up and having to deal with the legacy of a psychic displacement. It wasn't as if I really believed in ghosts. I was learning something new about myself. Try as I might, I felt these forces disrupt my life. Whether I stayed here or I moved, it would be all the same. I would still have to face their upset.

I felt more damned than ever. In my afterlife, I would face the punishment for everything that had fascinated me up to this point. I would recognize how I had contributed to this morass. I had given into the pleasures of the body.

My sorrow seemed a lot worse than anything that was occurring around me. I kept looking at my own faults and finding new ones. There seemed no end to this process. My stomach hurt. I kept on with the self-examination. I aspired after an evil that seemed greater than anything that I had previously contemplated. If I was going to be condemned, I needed to make sure that my fate was certain.

Was this perversity what had inspired the intruder. Had he cursed us because he knew that our nature was corrupt? I had already battled the same demon. And now he was coming back.

I wanted to stand up to the nightmare villain. I knew that he had nothing on me. He was cartoon-like in his dimensions. Behind his theatrics was another drama that had substance. The only way that I could relate to that hidden experience was through the emotions that I now felt. I felt confused. All this struggle may have simply been a distraction. But it wasn't as if I could work magic. I couldn't just fly across the room.

I inhabited this world between dreams and wakefulness. My imagination was primed by my visions. But these events seemed to announce something real. How did the world affect our perceptions so that it inspired the imagination? Dreams often seemed to repeat the detail of our lives in a new form. This enabled us to see patterns in our lives that were overexposed in the harsh daylight. Among these patterns, I was seeking another thread that pulled tighter during the more spectacular events. I was making something out of nothing. But I believed that my hysterics spoke of scary happenings to come. I tried to discern some meaning among all this disarray.

I felt the angel pass over each sleeping person and touch them with his curse. They were all being reminded of the flow of time. No one could escape the rough patches ahead. There was something so menacing in this visit. I couldn't put my finger on it. It wasn't as if we would wake up tomorrow to a disaster. The structure of this tremor was more encompassing. We would only catch snippets here and there. Then there would be the day that angel again knocked at the door. I would be too afraid to answer. I knew what was happening.

When I had been sick, I felt the demon ravage me personally. This punishment was more collective. I had been prepared by my unique experience. Now I was being told to share my knowledge with everyone else in the house.

As much as these events were offered for others, they made their impact known to me. I couldn't overcome my internal struggle to relate the tale to anyone else. I didn't have enough to go on. Without such information, they would never believe me. So the personal conflict became more intense.

I had attained a region that surpassed the river's trickling waters. I became engulfed by a more engaging image of the self. I felt dizzy. I was spiraling downward. I remained in darkness. The reflection was propagated by an entirely disruptive energy. I lost myself in its rhythms. I tried to shed myself of all the trappings of the ego. If there was some object that embodied my conflict, I hoped to focus my attentions on it. The self continued to absorb me.

I was reminded of how little life held for me. I could fit everything that I cherished in a suit case. I would make my way on the road. I would give myself to every place where I journeyed. It would be like a movie. I would assume a new identity. No one could find me. there was nothing to find.

I wanted to dig a deep hole in the ground. I wanted to bury myself neck-deep in dirt. Then I would be rooted. I would be allowed to grow. Instead, I was being tossed in the wind. I could feel a turbulence in this room. It was still. But I was being shaken all around. It was a metaphysical breeze. Only I could feel it. if the others woke, they would wonder why I was getting pulled back and forth.

As the room seemed to revolve around me, I came to know the self. I held on to these memories as they were being stripped from me. The turmoil made me feel worse. I had instantaneous glimpses of extreme happiness. They were followed by a gut-wrenching withdrawal of these gifts. This seemed to be leading to a cataclysm of a worse nature. I again imagined all the ill-effects of my disease. The terror spread all over me. Even as I craved the light, I regretted the approaching day.

I faced the daylight in the heart of the night. I was waking to a world denuded of people. I could pace all around the farm and not see a soul. What was going on? This was not a dream.

I was being taken into the heart of a vision. I would do anything to make all this stop. I was being fooled into doing something against my person. Usually, I would never act like. It was as if I was being tricked by some kind of nemesis. He was treating me to the delights of this earth. Once I accustomed myself to these treasures, he took them away from me. I would no longer be able to survive in the world.

My awakening was becoming unbearable. I wanted to jump back into the dream. but I never had been dreaming. That made my disquiet all the more unbearable. How could I ever end this conflict?

In my worst moments, I recognized that it would be ended for me. I would scream for rescue. I was being smothered in my sleep. This was no longer simply a bad dream. I was contributing to the experience. I was the intruder. I wanted to do damage against myself.

I could not abide with this logic. I was testifying against myself. My conscience was ripping me apart. If I wanted to end it all, that only made my intentions more suspect. It was being ended for me. Again, I was the executioner. I had been found out.

I had to go no further to ask who was behind it all. I was the culprit. I had engineered my own demise in my illness. That was why I had rushed down to the river. I wanted to throw myself into the pool teeming with life.

I could now feel the earth move beneath my feet. The catastrophe was upon me. It echoed in my heartbeat. I was in the midst of a tornado. It sucked in everything around me. We were all subject to its intent. There was nothing in me to fight back. I collapsed in total fright.

My ghosts were facing little resistance. I thought that I had the will to fight back. I had given in too easily. I couldn't overcome an enemy that had come from within. What was I doing to myself?

I didn't want to give my days to the supernatural. I could adorn myself with crosses. I could revere the saints. But I would not give in to spells and witchcraft. I wanted to get back to a strong foundation for my belief. I again called on reason. I would use my ingenuity to break down this puzzle. And I would push ahead.

My difficult victory made me tired enough that I could finally settle down. I had woven my way around this complexity. And now I had escaped from the maze. I let the fatigue roll over me. It was late, but I finally fell asleep.

When I woke the next day, I was so completely alive. Whatever had haunted me from the night before now remained as part of the darkness.

I took a long walk after breakfast. I saw a robin's nest. It made me feel invigorated. I found joy in this simple wonder.

I wanted to determine what I remembered from that tempestuous night. Were there any lessons to draw from a very taxing experience? I ran at full speed across a field. This reinforced how strong I was. I hardly felt winded. All my fears from the night before had dissipated in the morning heat. I smile as I surveyed the blue sky. Everyone could understand my recovery. But it was much more difficult trying to explain what had happened last night.

I stared at a giant oak tree to the left of the path that led to the house. It continued to reach its branches towards the heavens. I stretched out to imitate its gesture.

I wanted to dismiss my craziness as part of an overactive imagination. I was simply getting too emotional. But I could tell that there was something more somber awaiting me. If I

let it get to me, I wouldn't be able to do a thing. I couldn't let mental paralysis take over my body. I needed to keep moving. I flopped around like a busy bee. I filled my day with numerous activities.

When darkness fell, I was afraid. I wouldn't know how I would be able to deal with the change. But I took it all in stride. I read by an oil lamp. I became more and more tired. My eyelids felt heavy. I could barely stay awake.

I hit my pillow and went out like a light. If I had any dreams, I didn't remember them. My sleep was deep and restful. I had broken the hold of the eternal night. Despite my illness, I would not let the physical world dictate its terms to me. I could accommodate my body. But I would not be ruled by its appetites.

I was able to function. I would soon be going back to school. All the mountains were being worn down into molehills. I would learn how to survive within the world.

My deeper questions remained, but they were not so foreboding. I wasn't going to devote my life to breaking down the mysteries of the universe. If I took care of myself, I wouldn't have to. I hoped that circumstances would never become so crazy that I would completely lose control. Perhaps, I remained too withdrawn to really experience life.

I hadn't shirked my religious obligations. I had learned that faith was itself a product of a deeper awareness of the world. If I had to fudge things now and then, so be it. I had to ward off the evil. No amount of prayer was going to give me the skills that I had discovered on my own. I only wished that I was walking a tight rope. If St. Peter turned his head for a moment, was I ready to cheat? I could make that mad dash through the gates before he knew what had happened.

I watched a squirrel scurry up a tree. I wish I had it that easy!