

The Little Demon Doubt

I know when the demon got in my head. I know the very moment it sunk its dull rotting teeth into the pink flesh of my brain. It all started with my annual eye exam. When you're a professional knife thrower, having good eyesight is a definite perk. For years, I have gone in there, sat in the funny chair, and looked at the gibberish on the wall. Every year, they told me the same thing. Over and over, I have heard how great my eyes were. This time, however, the doctor told me that my vision was just that tiny bit not as perfect as it was last year. I don't need glasses or anything like that, yet. It was just the thought that my eyes were not what they used to be that began eating at me. I know, for the average person, this was not big news. For me, it was everything. A little shook up, I headed back out to the winter park that I currently call home. This was one of the parks where traveling circuses and sideshows spent the winter. There are three or four different troops in our park at any one time. We feel safer among our own rather than mixed into the world of the crowds we entertain. We affectionately called the trailer park La La Land.

Well, I tell you, I was depressed after the eye doctor so I went straight home, no shopping or anything. I normally make an entire day out of going into town. I always saved up all my errands, and just got them over with in one trip. The little demon was already at work. It chewed away at

virgin territory. I had never doubted my eyes before. There was truly no good reason to now, but the little demon had taken hold, and there was nothing I could do about it. As I got older, my eyesight would slowly get worse. How long did I have? How would I know? Was it already too late? Doubt was in my mind for the first time in over twenty years of throwing knives.

I threw more than just knives. Pretty much anything sharp enough to stick was game for me. It is just that the audience wants to see flesh out there. They want to see knives thrown at a live, barely dressed woman, the top heavier the better. They want to think that just for a moment, they might get to see something go wrong. Doubt and disbelief were supposed to plague the audience, not me. Oh, they clap and cheer when I make the throw they would never try, but deep down inside they are both terrified and hopeful they will see blood.

I got real lucky a couple of years ago. Sarah, one of the cutest acrobats you ever saw, took a fall during a practice. She was busted up pretty bad. Well, after she recovered some, she wanted to stay with the show. The boss suggested I use her as one of my targets. I gave her a try and she did real well. She didn't flinch or anything. That is rare in my business. Normally, it takes weeks of practice to stop the major flinching. After she got well, she started adding some of her acrobatics to the act. Soon, I was hurling knives at her as she bent over or under where the knife was going to go. The crowds loved her. I got all the big ohhhhs and ahhhhs, but it was her that everyone stared at. We started dating about a year ago. She moved into my trailer about six months ago. The little demon already started with her in my mind. What if my aim was off just a

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hair? It takes perfect vision to throw around a moving body. The little demon was really getting to me.

I fought the little demon off to a corner of my mind as I walked across the parking lot of La La Land. The little demon knew that the moment I got home, he was going to be the center of attention. The doubts just hung there patiently. I even managed to put on a smile as I walked. I think I finally understand clowns now. I was trying to think of anything, but the little demon chewing on my mind. Clowns painted on a face so no one ever knew what they were really thinking. I was trying to do the same thing.

I thought I heard a noise as I walked up to my trailer. I stopped and listened. There it was again. I thought it sounded like a grunt at first. Then, I thought it might have sounded like a moan. I listened more closely. I followed my ears around to the end of the trailer. Yes, I was hearing something. Maybe a puppy had gotten stuck in the fencing. I kept looking around until I realized the sounds were coming from inside the trailer. I had completely forgotten about the little demon by now. I'm sure he was just waiting to strike again at a moment's notice.

The shade was open just a tiny hairline crack. I don't know why I stood there trying to peek into my own trailer, but I did. I had to line up just right, and lean just so to line my eyeball up just perfectly. I must have been quite a sight hanging off the end of my own trailer. I couldn't see anything from that angle, but I could definitely hear more sounds. I thought I could make out the end of the bed. The covers were a mess, but I never make the bed. There was nothing to see, but still I watched. My toes began to cramp and my eyes were getting dry. Just another moment and I would have given up, but they rolled into view.

My dear Sarah was in bed with another man. I couldn't move. All I could do was watch. As I watched, I recognized the man. She was in bed with Raja. I didn't know what his real name was. I did know what he did for a living, but I had no idea I would ever see his act like this. Raja was also known as the Rubber Man. I had no idea that human bodies could do all that. The really amazing thing was that all those different body parts could all move like that, all at the same time. Morbid fascination took hold of my demon-infested mind. I couldn't move. I went numb all over as I watched. It was like some twisted special on late night cable television. I found myself becoming fascinated in what they would do next. I had no idea Sarah could move like that. They were like a pair of spiders glued together trying to walk up opposite walls.

As with all things good and bad, this had to eventually come to an end. I wondered if they needed a shoehorn or a crowbar to get untangled. The little demon had hit a gold mine with me today.

I was too numb to bust in and catch them just after the act. I had already seen the main show. I didn't want to hear the wrap-up. I was in no mood for a fight right now. The little demon suggested that we go over to the practice tent. It had an idea for me, but we needed a private place to talk. The tent was up and ready for tonight's show. The show was really just a practice run for the new acts, and anyone else who wanted to perform. I was scheduled that night. The little demon had me read the program over and over until I began to see what he was trying to show me.

We sat down and the little demon had me pull the doctor's evaluation from my pocket. We read it out loud to each other several times. My eyes were no longer perfect. My job required precision. Just an inch off here or there

could be disastrous. Knives have even been known to skip off the edge of a target, and fly out into the audience. Someone could be killed in a tragic accident like that.

The little demon had my entire life, past, present, and future to play with. How long had this been going on? Everyone else probably knew about it by now. We live in a small community where everyone knows everyone else's business. How could I face anyone in the park after seeing that? How could I ever look at Sarah without seeing those impossible angles again? I was too large and muscular to move like that. It just wasn't fair. I don't know how to do anything else. I have always been a knife thrower, now I'm going to wind up a laughing stock.

The little demon suggested that I get in some practice while we were alone. I needed something to occupy my time so I pulled out my targets and set them up. The little demon somehow found my new set of knives. I hadn't practiced with them much. I doubted I could control them perfectly. The little demon said that was why we were here. I needed a little practice time, alone. I closed my eyes and pictured Sarah beginning her routine. The first shot needed to land just above her hand as we did the introductions.

Thunk. The first blade stuck firmly into the wood right where it should have. I smiled as the little demon just nodded. It was an easy shot. There was really very little danger there. I watched my imaginary Sarah move to the center of the first target. There were two shots here, one on each side of her.

Thunk Thunk. Both of the finely ground steel blades bit deeply and held right where they were supposed to. The blades felt good in my hands. Some of the numbness began wearing off. I noticed that I felt a little warmer. My face flushed slightly. Somehow, my teeth started clenching and

my eyes began to narrow. I continued tracking the ethereal Sarah through the routine.

Thunk Thunk Thunk. The light glinted off the magnificently sharp metal instruments as they flew through the air. The hard wood was no match for their eager points as they thrust themselves deep into the target. These knives oddly felt a bit light in my hands. I was able to throw them harder than I usually threw my much more familiar set, the set I had no doubts about targeting with.

Thunk Thunk. Both blades stabbed viciously into the target where Sarah would be bending over, and then under those lethal pieces of flying death. Each blade landed just slightly off. I was happy to have this practice time. Someone could have been hurt. I could feel the audiences' eyes upon me at first then they would all be staring at her as she contorted and writhed her body for everyone to see. He would be sitting right over there. He would be watching her, knowing how much more he could make her twist and turn.

Thunk Thunk Thunk. The blades shifted slightly more off target with every throw. If I couldn't get those fatal points to their proper destinations, tonight's show would be more thrilling than anyone ever suspected. The crowd's secret desire just might come true. Her body was now a tangle of arms and legs as she moved to the final and most perilous of the targets. The spinner was where most accidents happen. She stands in front of the rapidly spinning targets as I hit them when they appear from around her body or between her legs. Anything could happen here. A blade could be caught in the spinner and hurled into her back or worse - out into the stands. If the blade went into the spinner on the outside of the right edge, it would be thrown out to the left. If a blade entered close

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to the center, just missing the body in front of it, it would be thrust out blade first into the body's back. Such accidents are often fatal. Only the most confident throwers use this type of spinner. Any doubt could be lethal.

Thunk Thunk. The little demon had been right to have me practice. My timing was just slightly off. The first blade caught the edge of the center spoke and hurled back towards me, passing my second throw. I had time enough to avoid my own airborne blade. The second caught the edge of an outside spoke on the left and was slung into the seat where he would have been sitting. It was practice like this that helped you avoid terrible accidents.

I stayed in the practice tent until show time. I avoided everyone I could and practiced that clown face idea I had earlier with everyone else I encountered. Sarah came and went until we were ready. She was calm and cool with her not so secret knowledge. I looked out front to see that there were many familiar faces mixed with a few new ones in the stands. Raja sat right where I thought he would. He was out there chatting with the fortuneteller. Her husband was away visiting relatives.

Act after act went out the curtain. There was much applause and cheering. Occasionally, you could hear laughter. The only thing I heard was the little demon doubt saying over and over, "I doubt you can. I doubt you can. I doubt you can."

Commentary:

The number of people who don't accomplish major things in their lives due to doubts in themselves is staggering. Doubt can be even more devastating if left unchecked. A doubt can fan the fires of fear, uncertainty, and jealousy.

We all have doubts and we find ways of dealing with them. In this story, I had fun personifying the doubt into a full character and letting it run loose. The moral of the story – I suppose it would be to be very careful how far you let your doubts control your actions.