

The Shadow

by Darius McCaskey

Last night I had a nightmare. I realized I was dreaming and forced myself back to consciousness.

As I began to slide back to wakefulness, the dream-demon tried to swallow my mind. Refusing to let me awaken without a fight, he attacked me with a claw of burnt midnight sky. His ebon hands fumbled about my head and face. I fled his ferocious assault.

Blackened flesh and sooty sinew melted away and the demon's hands became rivers of inky darkness. The Shadow tried to drown me beneath waves of undulating, liquid hate. I tried to paddle away, but the crests were too high, and I'm a poor swimmer. Icy, coal-black water began pouring down my throat and ears. As my lungs filled, I began to panic. The terror of drowning erased rationality and sense, my most prized possessions. Perhaps the dream-demon would finally have me.

I coughed and spat as the waves crashed about my head. Suddenly, I caught sight of a tiny island — barely big enough for a single person to stand on — nearby. I struggled to reach it before the waters of demonic rage could claim me.

Spending the last of my strength on reaching the island, I collapsed on the white sands of the minuscule beach. I became aware of a thin, sharp sound in the distance. It grew stronger with each wave lapping against my knees. I turned to see a tsunami of unearthly proportions rushing toward me.

Seconds before I was to be consumed completely by the hateful sea, a face appeared in the colossal tide. The demon's face — my face — laughed a loathsome, taunting laugh at me. Then the wave crashed down, and I was enveloped in the frigid, numbing waters.

I awoke with a start, clutching my black-and-grey blanket to my face.

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