

# My Shadow

*A Short Story of Horror*

by

Mohit Puvvala

## **NOTE:**

This short story contains usage of language that may be deemed inappropriate. Also, any relation to any real event is purely coincidental. The characters and events that take place in the story aren't real. Other than that, thanks so much for reading as it really means a lot to me!

- Mohit Puvvala

# My Shadow

## *A Short Story of Horror*

I know what I'm talking about when I say ghosts are real. To anyone who says he or she doesn't believe in the supernatural, your mind will be changed. The story I am about to tell you requires no pre-existing belief of the existence of ghosts. I only ask of your attention.

First, I should provide a little backstory of myself. I was born and raised the suburbs of my state (which I must not name to maintain my anonymity). The only experiences I had with any kind of "supernatural" being was in Halloween, and those were just kids my age dressing up as zombies or scary ghosts. So no, this isn't just something I've always believed in. Hell, horror movies were my jam. Everything was going great until my family moved to a rural area, which was built in the 1800s. I know, this was the perfect horror setting.

From the moment I stepped into that house, I knew living there wasn't going to be easy at first. However, my parents insisted that the house was grand and deserved some respect. The grandeur of the house is apparent; the house was a mansion and it provided a lot of space. Apparently the place used to have

a slave plantation, but it was torn down upon the previous owner's request. I guess the place had since turned into a symbol that the wrongs would be undone, but that history would stay to haunt this place forever.

At the nights in my room, I had nightmares. I was just so used to being in my old room that as soon as I stepped in my own room, everything seemed so detached from the world. It was as if my room was otherworldly. Sure, the room was big and it had a great interior design, but the lights were a little bit faulty. Every time I tried to turn off the damn things, there was a delay, and every time I tried to turn on the lights, there was this creepy flicker. When the lights would turn on, I would think that I saw someone in the brief flicker who was revealed for a millisecond before disappearing. I didn't know what was happening and I thought I was just freaking out for no reason. Moreover, my brother didn't seem to notice anything when he walked into my room and my family was enjoying its spacious home. Though the lights were fixed, I was still afraid. Everyone was joyous except for me. Soon, I became paranoid about being in my own room. I began to contemplate that there was more to this house than I thought. At night, I felt alone in my room, but I did not feel truly alone. I felt there was something else, that maybe I wasn't imagining what I saw during those light flickers.

I still went to the same school, though, and I still had the same friends. My home would be different (and further away from my school), but I knew there wasn't much different outside of the house. I was wrong.

The paranoia of the house seeped into my daily life outside of my home. I kept looking over my shoulder to make sure no one was there. Even in school, I felt as if I was being watched. I wasn't one of those loner kids in school, the kinds you see in horror films. I was really just a regular guy who got scared by scary things. Think about it. If you thought you saw something in your new room on multiple occasions, wouldn't you feel like there is more to the story? I certainly did and it became a habit for me to check the house routinely.

That wasn't even the worst part. I started to imagine things, a result of my overthinking. I kept looking down at my shadow in the sunlight and imagined that another shadow would emerge behind that. The whole thing was driving me crazy.

The other shadow was harmless, though, and I knew even if there really was a shadow and I wasn't just imagining it that a simple shadow wouldn't be harmful. However, the shadow became more apparent on some occasions, mostly when I was alone.

I started to become more removed from my classmates as I had stopped talking with them after school. My grades in school started to drop and my parents warned me that I was walking through a downward spiral. They started to put me in tutoring facilities and places where I spent five hours a week on subjects I was normally pretty good at.

As the days went by, I noticed that I didn't have a second shadow anymore. I thought that things were getting better and that part of this had something to do with my attention being diverted at the tutoring centers.

Yet, all that changed when my aunt and uncle were called over to check out the new house. They had two children – the older was my age and the younger was four at the time. They too loved the exterior and interior design, the spacious rooms, and the mansion like feel of the house. When I was washing my face (which I do when I am exhausted) on the second day that they were at the house, they left the bathroom door open. I looked in my mirror and saw my younger cousin walk in to say hello to me. I responded saying hello as well. As my eyes were closed, I continued to splash water on my face. Then my cousin said something I will never forget. She quietly asked, "Who's that man in the mirror?" My heart skipped a beat. I had no idea who she was talking about.

When I looked back into the mirror, however, nothing was there except for my cousin and me.

I turned around and asked my cousin, “What man?” She responded, “Never mind. I thought I saw a man. It’s just you probably.” You could probably say that my cousin was just imagining things, but I knew she saw something. Nevertheless, I decided that my cousin was probably referring to me in the mirror. After all, nothing unusual had come up in the past few weeks and I was beginning to let go of the problems that I had with this old mansion in the first place.

Nonetheless, one day, as I was walking through the school campus, I saw the second shadow again. I freaked out and tried to run away from the shadow. However, wherever I went, the shadow went. Something was different this time, though. The shadow started to perform actions. It was more visible and was clearly not the same as my own shadow. I couldn’t stand this any longer.

I told my parents what I have been experiencing ever since the house was bought. I told them about the flickering lights, the shadow, and the all around creepiness of the house. They seemed to be oblivious to any of this! They treated this as an excuse for my falling grades. However, as I insisted that what I was saying was true, my father must have been persuaded somehow.

Though my grades were plummeting, I wasn't dumb. I knew I had to pay attention to others' shadows. Maybe this thing was a scientific phenomenon, a way of lights doing their magic. After realizing that others shadows ONLY do things that mirror their owners, I came to the rather arrogant conclusion that my shadow wasn't of me. I know it's only been one incident, but you have to see that I was an impulsive teenager (okay that made me cringe, but it's true in retrospect). It's not that it did much that I didn't look for other possible solutions (I did), it's just that I was starting to become a huge believer in the supernatural. Every once in awhile, my shadow split into two.

I was diagnosed with somewhat of a minor form of schizophrenia after I had declared to the school that I would jump off the building because the dark shadow chased me to the top. I had to deal with that, too. I couldn't get a job because of my condition and I kept attributing the dual shadows to my schizophrenia. Maybe I really had it. Maybe I'm still crazy, but I don't know because later on, I'll tell you some absolutely batshit crazy stuff that's really going to end up asking the question to you.

I know I said some stuff about the job and that's after high school, but I'm going to take it just a bit back in the timeline. After high school, I didn't go to college - there were too many people and I never did well with them. I was

always pretty weird to them. I've tried to pinpoint exactly what the problem was and put the blame on others, but I honestly just think I was me. Plus, people must have viewed me as a psychopath considering that my schizophrenia was announced in my junior year. All this made me feel a bit alone so after I moved out (luckily I was able to make enough money flipping burgers and writing blog posts during high school), I got a dog. He was honestly the best friend I ever had and I know that's something a lot of people say and I never had any other friends so I wouldn't have anything to compare with, but I knew he was the coolest buddy ever when I got him so I named him Buddy. There were times when I cried because I felt alone and Buddy was there to snuggle up with me and make me feel okay again. It sounds dark, but I would have been creamed by a car on so many occasions (I don't drive because of my "condition," but the doctor said I might not be fully aware of my surroundings so even walking in front of cars is a problem). Buddy would bark and I would know that whatever problem I was in could be solved.

The best part about Buddy was that I never had any shadow problems. My belief in the supernatural slowly faded away.

A few weeks ago, Buddy died after two years of being with him. I've overheard people talking about how their dog lived for over a decade, but come

one, man, two years? I found his neck stuck in the front entrance to my apartment building as he whimpered in fear until he stopped breathing. I either didn't know what just happened or I couldn't accept it. Either way, I rushed him to the vet. The doctor attributed his death to a snapped neck. That fucking door closes on its own. I wish he went through the dog door like he always did, but everyone makes mistakes. I don't know what I was thinking after that, but I can tell you I felt like my heart was stolen for good. I couldn't go the lost and found and recover it - it was gone and stolen by the mastermind of thieves, Death herself. Even today, I picture his mind racing as he realizes the parts of the world he's leaving behind. Maybe I wasn't the best friend I could be, but god dammit this his death had me crying on his soft fur. He was my best Buddy. My mind went to dark places after that as I had often looked to the disorderly set of kitchen knives. Notice how the shadow hasn't come back yet? Well here's what happened yesterday.

My apartment without Buddy was quiet. After a few weeks, I got kind of used to being alone again. Every time I went to get groceries, I closed my eyes as I went near that front entrance. The small bloodstain from Buddy's neck was all cleaned up, but my memory of it was lodged in my brain. I couldn't stand touching the door and feeling it's old door handle. I fucking hate old, rusty brass.

It reminded me of the kind in my old house, the one that caused me all that pain and put me in this shithole of a situation in the first place. After a few weeks, though, I figured that I had to move on. I couldn't just buy a new dog because that would make me forget my time with Buddy. I needed to just face the loss and be happy because it's what Buddy would have wanted. He always wanted to make me feel comfortable.

It was time to take a good look at that door all the way downstairs. I needed to see every crease in that wooden door, feel the brass doorknob, hear the echoes of Buddy's whimpers, and get it all out not only for my sake, but also for Buddy's. I traveled downstairs. Slowly, I stepped down. At this point, I was reliving my final moments with buddy. I was reliving that fear in both my eyes and his. As I saw that door, time slowed down. I saw the pathetic excuse of a stained glass window. I heard my dog crying and pictured the tears running down his eyes as they were pouring down mine. Time slowed down even more. I remembered all my favorite memories with Buddy - all the time he saved me from my conflicted mentality. Time practically stopped when I crouched down and peered into the small chip in the wooden door that was the cause of my dog frantically resisting the automatic push of the door. Wait a second. Time. It would have taken a little while for him to go down there and he wouldn't go that

far away from me. I figured he could get out of the door as that was open during the night, but how did he - how the fuck did he get in that situation.

Oh no. The doctor said one of the symptoms of schizophrenia was destructive behavior. I rushed back upstairs and blasted open the door with my arms so hard that the doorknob left a huge dent in the wall it smashed into. Sitting on the countertop next to my couch was the set of kitchen knives. If I had chased him downstairs, then how come whatever knife I used was put back in? I couldn't have chased my dog downstairs, watched him get stuck down there, and refused to help him even if I wasn't in control. I didn't need to be in control to know that I put my best buddy before me in every situation. Buddy and I were more than family. I checked each knife in the set to see if there was any with blood on it. I rolled my long sleeves up and saw that I had used the damn knife as I eerily observed my name sprawled across my forearm. At the end of my name was a question mark. As I picked at the hole from the dot in the question mark (the only mark that hadn't healed enough to become a scar), drips of blood dribbled down the side of my forearm. Did I scare Buddy enough that he ran away? Suddenly, I remembered.

I did both. I remember carving the letters into my hand at night and watching Buddy bark in shock and run downstairs. I remember myself taking

the knife and walking down the staircase. I remember myself saying to my Buddy, “I’m supposed to be alone.” The worst part was when I watched as Buddy ran through the dog door and I followed by pushing the door open and running outside with the knife in my hand. As I ran outside, Buddy ran back in. Confused by this, I tripped and fell. I guess Buddy’s friendly nature got to him as he barked and rushed to my rescue while the door started to close. I turned around and saw Buddy go halfway through the opening. Abruptly, a gust of wind forced the door to close on my only friend. I must have blacked out because I don’t remember anything after that.

Now, as tears ran down my eyes, I had no other choice but to question everything I was. I rushed to the mirror and screamed at it. I cursed myself and asked the mirror why I was who I was before I looked down and cried into the sink. After I finally calmed down, I wiped my face and stared into the mirror as the final tears ran down my cheek.

This place was quiet. When I looked in the mirror, I saw what could only be described as my shadow, a second me. Isn’t that what a shadow is, after all? The only difference was he was smiling.

This sick joke. All these years, I had been shoved aside by the doctors who told me I was wrong. I even thought I was wrong. It turns out I had been right all along.

You see, these things aren't confined to old houses like the kinds you see in horror movies. A person didn't have to die in the general vicinity of the haunted area decades ago for the ghost to roam the lands. That's what scares me. Some ghosts just want to hurt others. They just want to manipulate you into believing they don't exist and that's when they strike. The realm beyond our own can be a dark and fucked up place. They watch us with their eyes from below and take all the time they need before playing their cards. This one's final card was to show me that I fell for it, to prove to me that I could never win. As I saw that smile in the mirror, I knew my shadow had returned.