

Chapter 1

A Scarecrow's Horror

Hey, Doctor.

**Jason. Nice to meet you. Please have a seat.**

Thanks for seeing me. A friend of my mom's recommended you as being pretty good.

**I'm glad to hear that. How old are you, Jason?**

Almost 17. How old are you?

**I'm middle-aged -- if I live to be 100, that is.**

Cool. I'm hoping to be your age someday. By then maybe I'll be able to think normally at least.

**Do you have a picture in your mind of yourself at my age?**

Actually, yeah, I do. I can see myself sitting behind a large dark wooden desk . . . maybe smoking a cigar.

**What are your thoughts in that image?**

Sort of quiet . . . or *serious*. I've got things pretty much figured out. No problems with my thinking, that is.

**Is that why you're here today?**

Right -- like I told you on the phone, I can no longer think, if you can believe it.

**But aren't you demonstrating some sort of thinking ability just by talking to me and answering my questions?**

Yeah -- I mean I have the *ability* to think. But I can only do it when I forget for a minute that I can't think. I swear to God I can't think any thought unless I forget I can't think . . . or something like that. 'Course, when I forget I can't think, my old mental habits kick in and I can think again.

At least for that moment.

**Just for a moment?**

Listen. I doubt if you or anyone else can help me with this. Just seems like if anyone can figure it out, it'd be you.

**I can try.**

You're a thought doctor, right?

**That's one way of putting it. Yes, Jason. I have a Ph.D. in thought, specializing in human thought.**

I guess we'll see how good you are.

**Do you see yourself as someone who is stupid?**

I'm not the brightest guy around, but I suppose I'm not stupid. I just wish that I could think as freely as an idiot.

**Do you see yourself as being alone in not being able to think?**

Yes . . . . No, wait. *You* can't think either. You just don't realize it. Nobody can.

**When will I begin to realize that I can't think?**

I hope you're not going to just humor me, Doctor. You think I'm crazy, right?

**Please call me George. And I'm taking you completely seriously.**

Okay. You'll probably never realize that you can't think, George.

**By the way, "crazy" is a word I prefer not to use too often.**

Well, I'll use it: My problem is literally driving me crazy. I feel like I'm going insane.

**In what way?**

I don't know . . . my senses are starting to play little tricks on me.

**Do you ever get violent thoughts?**

No.

**We'll return to these sensory tricks if we need to. How specifically do you suppose I can help you?**

It's just that you know what thinking is, and I'm trying to find out what you know. Do you know *precisely* what it is to think? That'd help me a lot.

**I'm a student of philosophical and scientific disciplines that address mind theory. Philosophers for ages have attempted to categorize and define who we are, what we know, and what precisely we need in order to be happy and successful creatures.**

You're just a student?

**I'm pretty well read, and I feel I know as much about my field as anyone else does.**

So does that mean you know *precisely* what it is to think?

**I'm going to answer you as honestly as I can. I don't think anyone knows precisely what it is to think.**

How can anyone be an expert in an area where nobody knows any truth?

**My expertise is equivalent to what a medical doctor knew 100 years ago. I'm an expert in the sense that I keep up with the accomplishments and discoveries made by others in my field. Unfortunately, the field I have chosen has yet to accomplish as much as other fields, such as medicine and the hard sciences.**

I'm guessing you won't be able to help me.

**But you may be able to help yourself through my guidance. As long as we're here together, we might as well just talk. You never know what insights might rise to the surface. I'll probably learn something, and I sincerely hope that you will, as well. Do you feel comfortable talking to me?**

So far, I guess. If you didn't charge so much, maybe I could afford to feel bad.

**What was your early childhood like, Jason?**

My childhood was pretty nice, other than being bullied a few times for having hair that's too long.

**Any memories of abuse by adults?**

No.

**Would you describe for me your worst memory from 3rd grade?**

My teacher kicked me out of class one time because I wouldn't take my hand out of my pocket.

**What was in your pocket?**

Nothing. I liked having my hand there, but it must have gotten into her head that I was playing with myself.

**But you weren't?**

I didn't even know I *could* play with myself. I was the most obedient kid.

**Except you wouldn't remove your hand from your pocket?**

I guess I was stubborn that day. Probably because she was sort of calling me a liar, and I never lie. My mom taught me not to.

**Did your teacher humiliate you?**

Heck yeah -- she yanked my ears and banged my head against the wall.

**Was this a private school?**

Yes. She was a nun.

**So there was a certain amount of abuse by adults.**

Sure, by her.

**Do you have any disturbing dreams?**

Not for a long time. But I had a really bad one when I was still a baby.

**You told me not to just humor you, so I'll tell you that infants do not have the neurological equipment to create long-lasting memories.**

The dream was so horrible that from then on, I was always afraid about the dream coming back again.

**You probably had the dream after your second or third birthday.**

No way. Also, I became extra aware after I had the dream. Sort of like waking up to life, I guess. I remember lying in my crib. I can still see the room and exactly where the crib was sitting and which way it was facing. My mother says my memories are right and she also told me that we moved out of that house before my first birthday.

**Tell me about the dream, if you can still remember it. Were you seeing things through your own eyes, or were you seeing things through some other perspective?**

I remember it as well as I did when I was an infant. I saw things through my own eyes.

**I won't dwell on this, but mind scientists have determined that almost all true memories die fairly quickly. When we recall something from our past, what we are actually recalling is a reconstruction of the original memory. As we get older, repeated reconstructions tend to warp the original, much like a 10th generation of a photocopy diminishes the clarity of the original.**

You sound more like a poet than a scientist.

**Apparently you've been exposed to Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality*. He may have been a romantic dreamer, but Wordsworth got a lot right in his explanations of mental realms.**

Well, I hope you also studied the more scientific guys, too.

**I have. Let's get back to your early memory. Whether or not it's a first-generation memory, you speak about it as though it affected your life significantly.**

It really did. Ever since I had the dream, I've lived in complete fear every day.

**Fear of what?**

I guess that the dream would come true, or else return in another dream. And fear of what it might mean.

**Has the dream ever returned?**

Never. At least not that I've remembered in the morning.

**Have you had any other dreams that were comparably nightmarish?**

No. I might have a nightmare once in a while, but not like that early dream.

**Can you describe the dream?**

It was just an old man standing on the upstairs balcony outside the back of our house.

**And what did this old man do?**

He just stood there.

**What took place?**

Nothing.

**What was so fearful and powerful about the dream?**

The old man was -- I'm using words that I didn't have at the time -- he was the picture of evil. Like Satan. Just really evil and frightening.

**Did you know who the old man was, or was he just a generic old man?**

I remember thinking he might be my grandfather. But I'm not sure -- maybe I came up with that later.

**Did your grandfather seem like a scary person to you in your waking life?**

No. He's one of the nicest and funniest people I know of.

**But back then -- do you have any negative memories about him?**

Not that I can think of. He was always a great guy to me and treats me pretty well. Really, my grandfather has nothing to do with the problem I'm here about today.

**Perhaps. On the other hand, your dream seems to have significantly affected your life.**

It definitely has.

**How would you be different today if you'd never had this horrible dream?**

Well, like I said, it was so scary that it became sort of a companion to me. I worried about it every day. I don't know how I'd be different without it.

**Take a moment and guess, Jason.**

Okay . . . let's see. Maybe I'd be less aware of all the stuff that's around me.

**Maybe you'll be a detective some day.**

No. Not that kind of stuff. I'm just more aware of my inner surroundings -- the kinds of things most people don't seem to see. Does that make any sense?

**Tell me how that works.**

Maybe it's just that I don't look the other way when my mind speaks to me. So . . . what do you think of Freud?

**I think a lot of things about Freud. What about you?**

Oh, he was no doubt a brilliant guy, but he talked about how we're supposed to be cut off from our subconscious -- or is it the unconscious? Anyway, I remember one time a teacher made us read a speech he gave where he said that people can only read their unconscious minds under certain special conditions. I have a feeling that his whole point about the mind -- the way he was into naming parts like the Id and superego -- have made people lazy and afraid of their minds. I guess he felt that he could just make up all that crap. That's sort of what our teacher told us, anyway. Except that she seemed to like his mind words.

**Most people haven't read Freud.**

But his words have become everyday names. Everyone takes his descriptions for being true.

**How do you see the role of the unconscious mind?**

I don't see it as any kind of real thing. To me it's like -- our muscles sometimes operate when we tell them to, and sometimes they operate all on their own.

**Can you give me a specific example of how you're different as a result of having had your early dream?**

I guess I just pay more attention to what my brain tells me. I try not to ignore it.

**What has it told you?**

Okay. In different accidents, I broke my left wrist, my nose, three toes, and I dislocated my left shoulder. Whenever I got hurt, my brain told me exactly how to fix myself. I think that's instinct, right?

**Did you try to fix your injuries?**

I didn't just try, but I actually set my own wrist, and straightened out my nose right as soon as I saw it in the mirror. I left my toes alone, which is what the doctor did too, and I ignored my brain's instructions on how to fix my shoulder.

**Why didn't you fix your shoulder?**

That was my most recent accident, and I just remembered how painful it was to set my own wrist. I figured that I didn't need that kind of pain again. That's what hospitals are for. But I knew exactly what to do. I just chose not to do it.

**Have you ever used hallucinogenic drugs?**

No.

**Ever get high on pot?**

No. I'm a Christian.

**How long have you been a Christian?**

All my life, I guess. I was baptized as a baby.

**Do you remember being baptized?**

Course not. It happened way earlier than my old dream.

**Did being baptized make you believe in God?**

No. But when I was twelve years old, a bunch of Jesus freaks visited our church, and they taught me that religion can be lots more than just going to Mass and observing all the different ritual stuff. They taught me how to be born-again.

**This revitalized your faith?**

Actually, what they did was they showed me what true faith was. Before I saw them, I never really had it.

**During the moment just before you decided to become born-again, what were your thoughts?**

I had a revelation.

**Like Saul while walking down the road to Damascus?**

I guess so -- at least the way the Bible tells that story.

**What exactly is a revelation?**

A revelation is when God speaks to you.

**He reveals something?**

Exactly.

**What did he reveal to you?**

The truth of what I had been taught by my religion teachers.

**So he revealed things that had been put in your mind during your education?**

I suppose.

**I'm trying to connect a 12-year-old boy's need to be a born-again Christian with . . .**

With my dream?

**Is there a connection?**

Absolutely -- a strong connection. What those Jesus freaks talked about rang true for me because I had seen that evil really is a *thing*. I saw it in that old dream.

**A thing that needs to be battled.**

That's right . . . or at least guarded against.

**Can you tell me what you know about evil?**

You know what evil is.

**I want to hear what you have to say about it.**

Well, it's what Satan is. Evil is all the stuff that's wrong and bad.

**Is it violent?**

Of course. It's everything that's not good and right.

**Do you know where evil comes from?**

The Bible says that it came from fallen angels, led by Satan or Lucifer.

**Do you think of Satan as a real live being, or more like a fairy tale?**

I used to think of all those Biblical guys as being sort of like a fairy tale. But now I know that they're real characters. . . beings, rather.

**I want to move on. But let's get back to the subject of evil later on, okay?**

Alright.

**Do you have any idea why you find yourself in this conundrum of seeing yourself as not being able to think?**

Want me to tell you how the whole thing got started?

**Sounds good.**

Well, a couple years ago, some guys and I would sometimes drive around with Gary Zurkowski in his classic old Mustang. Gary was in his twenties. He was gay and he'd sometimes try to hit on us, but we just acted like we didn't hear him. He had a neat car and was really cool and smart, so we didn't care. Anyway, I remember riding around, pretending like we were in a spaceship while we zoomed along the highway. Gary'd sometimes spark up a joint and offer it to me and my friends.

**But you never tried it?**

No. The other guys usually would, though. Anyway, Gary would sometimes throw out little things that would get us talking.

**What sorts of things?**

I forget what exactly he'd say, but they weren't things I was brought up to believe in, you know? If I could just think, I'd tell you what they were.

**If you'd like I could hypnotize you.**

That's pretty weird, because actually I have the feeling I'm already hypnotized.

**Have you been hypnotized before?**

No. But I feel like I am now. So you know all about hypnosis?

**What's happening to you is that I'm compelling you to look at certain aspects of your life that aren't explored in everyday types of conversation. Essentially, it amounts to a mild type of hypnosis.**

So you've hypnotized me then?

**Not in the more serious way you're probably thinking of. But conversation can be potent in its hypnotic effect. You've hypnotized friends just by talking to them and delivering a unique point of view, if they end up buying into it. I'll hazard a guess that Gary hypnotized you and your friends in the casual conversational way.**

While we were driving around he'd say crazy things like: "There's no reality other than what a person's able to create," and "The trees and land outside are moving, and we're actually standing still," and "Concepts can't be thought -- only encountered."

**And a lot of marijuana smoke was in the air?**

At times, yeah.

**Did you and your friends find Gary's statements worth pondering?**

It was tons of fun at first, but eventually the stuff sort of shut down my brain. Somehow I started thinking that my mind -- and everyone else's -- was not just an illusion, but a completely impossible hallucination or something. Mind couldn't exist, and every time I tried to think about anything, the impossibility of my mind just popped up in front of me and kind of paralyzed my thoughts. It's sort of tortured me ever since.

**Has your Christian faith changed since these conversations in Gary's car?**

No.

**Has anything about your faith been disrupted?**

Actually, now that you mention it . . . it seems like every time I read the Bible now, I have to stop after a few verses.

**Why do you have to stop?**

Because if I keep on going, the whole thing starts to seem false.

**You start questioning your belief system?**

I guess in a way.

**Jason, our time is about up. Would you like to see me next week?**

Do you think you'll be able to help me?

**I might be able to help you sort things out for yourself, Jason. The only problem is that I tend to analyze things outside any religious realms.**

That's no problem, believe me. I'm pretty desperate.

**But since you see life within a religious realm, my analysis may conflict with your point of view. The things I say may have an effect similar to what happens when you read your Bible. In other words, I don't want to disrupt your faith.**

Listen -- if you can help me, I don't care what you say.

**Alright then. Schedule an appointment with my receptionist, and I'll see you next week. Oh -- one more question: Does your grandfather have false teeth?**

Yeah, he's had false teeth for as long as I can remember.

**Have you ever seen him take his teeth out?**

I guess so.

**You said he has a good sense of humor. Have you ever seen him joke around by taking his teeth out in front of little kids?**

No.

**Is he your mother's father or your father's father?**

My mother's.

**Will you do me a favor and ask your mother if your grandfather has ever used his false teeth to joke around with little children?**

Sure. I'll let you know what she says.

**See you next week then.**

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**Good morning, Jason.**

Hi, George.

**Do you still feel hypnotized?**

I still have my problem. In fact, it's been worse than ever.

**I'm sorry to hear that.**

You think you'll be able to solve it?

**I think *you* 'll be able to. Have you asked your mother about your grandfather's false teeth?**

Oh, yeah. How did you know he used to pull out his fake teeth and scare little kids?

**I didn't know. It was a hunch. But first let's talk about evil again for a minute.**

Okay.

**You implied last week that you saw evil as something very tangible, right? And that it can be personified in real creatures that fully represent it.**

That's right.

**For the sake of the discussion we're having today, can we put spirituality aside? That is, will you permit us to examine things from a strictly material point of view?**

Actually, that's exactly what I'm hoping for. I have a feeling that spirits aren't going to help me solve my problem.

**With that in mind then, let's look at evil. Does it exist for animals as well, or just with people?**

Probably with people only. I doubt if animals can tell when evil is around.

**Why do you say that?**

Because Lucifer and Satan only corrupt people, far as I know.

**Let me put it this way: What sort of concept would a chimpanzee form in its mind when it faces potential death or horrible pain?**

I don't know. Something like what we call evil?

**Are you asking or stating?**

I suppose I'm asking more than stating. But I think I get your point, if that's your point.

**Okay, let's look at evil in a slightly different angle. Let's imagine the distant future -- a time when all religions, for one reason or another, have died out. Deistic beliefs have somehow either been banned or died a natural death. This is a purely theoretical future, in order to allow us to explore a concept. I doubt if such a future will ever come to be.**

So, now you want me to imagine the role of evil in that society?

**Yes. What sort of concept would express the feelings of these people if they encountered circumstances that are truly fearful, such as impending or actual violence to themselves or their families?**

It'd be exactly what we call evil.

**Now let's get back to your grandfather and your early dream.**

You think he tried to scare me with his false teeth?

**I don't think he knew that it would traumatize you, but he probably scared you silly by taking out his teeth in front of you when you were very young, and made what he thought was a silly face in front of you. He might have made scary sounds, too. Do you have any inkling of a recollection of such an experience?**

No. But I suppose it makes sense.

**It would completely explain the source of your nightmare, and its intensity.**

It was the mother of all nightmares.

**During the dream, you got an image of pure evil -- not because of some Platonic or spiritual ideal of evil that exists outside of your mind. The evil you saw was a result of impending violence to yourself.**

Maybe the dream was just a reaction to my Grandfather's messing around, which I didn't

understand.

**Could be. And even if I'm mistaken and your grandfather never did anything to traumatize you, it doesn't matter, because I think you understand the nature of evil in a very literal way.**

I appreciate your help with all of this, but I don't see how it has anything to do with the problem I'm trying to fix.

**Stick with me, Jason. You told me you were baptized as an infant. What church were you raised in?**

Catholic. I went to their schools, too, all the way through tenth grade.

**I take it they drilled you pretty thoroughly.**

Big time.

**They taught you how to see the world. They didn't just answer your questions, but told you what questions were serious, then answered them for you before you could even ask them yourself, right?**

You mean life purpose, things like that?

**Exactly. And you bought into it, right?**

That's right. I never knew any other way to see things.

**But when you were in Gary's Mustang, you and your friends began to buy into completely new ways of seeing your role in the world.**

Actually, I pretty much buy into it now. I'm trying to see things in less superstitious ways than before. One of my problems is trying to put the new ideas into my old mental habits.

**Are you moving away from religion?**

I'm definitely moving away from religious things I've been taught. I've always felt that a lot of it was crap. I'm hoping that God will stay in my life, though. Just not in a religious sort of way.

**How have you been moving away from religion?**

For one thing, I'm trying to stop seeing God and Jesus as always looking at what I'm doing. It really bugs me if someone thinks I need that much watching over. I'm also trying not to see

supernatural signs in everyday kinds of things.

**So you're moving away from superstitious thinking and behaving?**

Absolutely. I'm trying to escape it because I don't see it as making much sense any more, and it tends to make me frustrated and crazy.

**It probably also influences you toward making unwise decisions, am I right?**

It's not like avoiding black cats or the number 13 -- not that kind of superstition. It's more like certain kinds of beliefs that don't make much sense. And thinking that coincidences in my life are supposed to be lessons from God. The freaky image of evil in my early dream sort of made me become religious, but maybe I can survive now with less of it since I understand the dream better. I sure hope so anyway.

**You may want to read some philosophy. Perhaps take a couple of college courses.**

Okay.

**I wish you the best with that. As for the problem you came to see me about. . .**

I still don't feel very confident. I mean, I'm okay talking to you, but I know my old anti-thinking thing will return later on. It's like it's always been there.

**Gary was somewhat of an intellectual, I take it.**

Definitely. Sometimes he'd mention books he'd read.

**Are you familiar with existentialism?**

I've heard of it, but that's about it.

**Let's assume that your friend Gary has read about existentialism.**

Okay, but I really don't know what it is.

**When you were a child in school, you've told me, Catholic children were not taught how to think for themselves about matters of life meaning?**

Right. The priests and nuns would tell us how to see the world.

**Did they clue you in on how they'd arrived at their opinions?**

I don't think so. Sometimes they'd talk about some big important guy. My dad's mentioned him, too -- Aqua-something? -- some guy who lived back in the olden days.

**Could be they were referring to Thomas Aquinas, the great Catholic philosopher.**

Could be.

**The point is that questions about human existence, according to your teachers, had been addressed and reconciled hundreds of years ago. Now what do you think existentialism might be?**

I don't know . . . questioning what's already been figured out about life and everything?

**I think that's a pretty apt representation.**

So Gary was questioning or examining his whole life?

**Perhaps, but not necessarily. If he enjoyed reading books written by existentialists, he may have been simply buying into the opinions of the authors he read.**

Maybe not though?

**Right -- but he was evidently questioning old existential paradigms. Now, what do you suppose existential authors might say in response to what Thomas Aquinas and other religion philosophers wrote about?**

I'm just guessing here . . . maybe the modern guys are trying to point out mistakes the old guys made?

**Okay. What else would you suppose?**

Maybe they were putting out their own take on history and what it means to be a person.

**Not bad, Jason.**

It sounds like a big clash.

**A clash of what?**

Between different ways of looking at things, I suppose.

**And did this clash also take place in your mind when you pondered the things Gary threw out to you?**

It made me want to figure out answers to questions like *How do human beings fit into the world?* and *How do thought processes take place?* Back in Catholic school, nobody ever seemed to care about this stuff, like thinking about it wasn't even allowed or anything. And I was totally obedient, as long as I wasn't being accused of lying, that is.

**In fact, you were cleverly indoctrinated into a world that abhors rational thought process.**

Then when my buddies and I started discussing Gary's comments, I needed to come up with insights about how to think. And now I need to figure out how to actually *retrain* myself to think.

**You might say that Twentieth-Century nihilistic fact had come face to face with Judeo-Christian civilization.**

Do you think I'll ever be able to get the mind-is-an-illusion thing out of my head?

**Our minds are indeed illusions. We inherit hallucination itself as a way of life, going all the way back to the first creature that was able to perceive something other than what was directly affecting its senses. Illusion is part of each animal perception other than what our immediate senses tell us.**

But if you really know that mind's an illusion, how do you get past that so you can just get along mentally?

**Just because something is an illusion doesn't mean that it's not useful or usable.**

Is there a book that could help me?

**Quite a few books, written by philosophers. It will take work on your part, but some of them directly address your problem. For instance, insights of Kant and others were largely a reaction to the myths that were and continue to be commonly taught by theologians as truth.**

I've never thought that any of that philosophy stuff made much sense.

**Although philosophical insights can be useful in solving questions about cognitive psychology, they are as irrelevant to most human activity as quantum theory is for an engineer putting up a building.**

But I'm sort of an exception, right?

**Though it's not common, others have had the exact same problem that you have. You'll do**

**just fine. You've retained healthy habits of thought, even if you've incorporated a few unhealthy ones as well. What's fantastic is that you've decided to set out to look at your mental habits, and to choose which ones to keep and which to discard. Doing so will be difficult at times, but I don't think you need to be afraid. I know you're not afraid to peer deep into the recesses of your interior. Just keep in mind that mental habits don't change overnight. It takes a great deal of perseverance and patience.**

I guess I already know that. So, how should I go about it?

**Write down your thoughts every day for the next couple of years. Only by writing will you be able to analyze your thoughts clearly, because doing so will allow you to collect many insights and other details over a long period of time -- important details that you may otherwise forget about. Writing will also compel you to organize these details into meaningful sentences and paragraphs -- complete thoughts. Unless you do this, your mind may never fully heal. I also recommend that you read some non-theological philosophy, especially 20th-Century writers. A few names that come to mind are Russell, Wittgenstein, and Popper. If you want to get into some earlier work, you could try Kant, Kierkegaard, and Hegel. But these three may prove to be a bit difficult.**

**One last suggestion: Someday you'll probably find yourself sitting behind a big dark-colored desk, smoking a cigar. I want you to interview yourself, in writing, about life meaning that you have obtained.**

Interview myself? How do I do that?

**Just adopt an interviewer's voice that asks you questions. Imagine the interviewer as a friend, a therapist, whatever you wish. This will compel you to explain things more clearly than if you used a standard progression of paragraphs.**

Yeah, but what if I never smoke cigars or get a big dark desk?

**Interview yourself anyway, once you've reached my age. Quit working for a few weeks or months if necessary, in order to devote the proper attention to your task. Spend time at the local bookstores and coffee hangouts talking to people and working out your thoughts. Maybe you'll be able to fictionalize the experience into a book.**

That'd be cool. Okay. Yeah. Thanks, Doctor.

**Of course. You're quite welcome, Jason.**

