

DREAMER

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#1

Okay, I heard about this idea about keeping a writing journal somewhere. I can't remember if it was MasterClass, Stephen King, or some random blog, but the idea is to keep this alongside my manuscript, and I update it periodically as I write my novel. I have no idea what I'm doing, so why not do what the professionals – or a random blogger – recommend to document this process? I can't imagine that anyone but me will ever read this, but at least, maybe I can document all my mistakes for "future me" to look back on and avoid repeating.

Anyway, I'm writing a horror novel. My first novel. Am I a first-time novelist, or do I actually have to finish this book before I can even claim that title? I'm a future, first-time novelist, and I'm writing horror for the first time. I'm also feeling a little unhappy with my progress, and I'm so desperate to produce words that I will evidently start a journal to avoid editing the earlier chapters in what could only generously be described as half a novel.

#2

Stuck. Stuckity, stuck, stuck, stuck. Suck. I am bereft of clever ideas and new twists. I'm trying to write a horror story, but there is no more horror. Bad things happen, but that hardly makes it horror. It's no longer scary, just depressing. I need something... special.

#3

I had a dream. Well, actually, I had a nightmare or night terrors or something like that. I know this isn't my personal journal, but I might try to use some of this, so indulge me. Maybe this is what Stephen King meant about being inspired by his nightmares, or maybe I'm just a hack. Anyway, I'm writing down what I remember for posterity, in case I want to use some of it.

I was in an old house. My wife, Sarah, was there with me, I guess. So, *we* were in an old house. I remember that nothing was particularly haunted about the house, but everything just felt off. You know that weird feeling where you just *know* it's a nightmare, but you can't explain why? Yeah. I know "unexplainably creepy" is a bad description for a writer, but bear with me. I'll try to think up more words for the novelization, but just imagine an old house where you feel the hair raising on the back of your hands for no reason. Remember that feeling of realizing that you're in a nightmare, even when you can't see the thing that wants to devour you.

Out of nowhere, Sarah came running down a broken down staircase and said, "There's something wrong with the mirrors." She kept repeating it like a warning or a mantra. What did it mean? *What* was wrong? She wouldn't let me go up the stairs, but she couldn't explain why. She just kept repeating the enigmatic phrase, and I felt my heart race each time she said the words.

I was filled with pure terror, and I tried to scream, but nothing came out. No words. No scream. I couldn't push sound or air out through my throat, and thought I might suffocate in the old house at the foot of the stairs.

Suddenly, I found myself back in my bed, staring up at the real Sarah. A scream had escaped my lips in the real world, and she was shaking me awake. I couldn't explain the horror of the dream at the time, so I just told her I had a nightmare, and we both tried to go back to sleep.

The feeling of that house and the words of "nightmare Sarah" stuck with me, though. I can still feel it creeping in and waiting at the edge of my thoughts.

#4

I told Sarah about the dream. Like all nightmares, it started to lose its power in the retelling, but not completely. She thought the single line was incredibly creepy. *There's something wrong with the mirrors.* It's so odd and unsettling as a grouping of words, it can't help but sound haunting. What does it even mean? Why did it scare me so much? It doesn't matter. I'm using it in the novel, per Sarah's suggestion. I'm starting out a chapter with it, hoping it helps me find some real horror in my story.

#5

The new “mirrors” chapter turned out really well. Thankfully, I added in better description of the old creepy house because I was able to remember more of it while writing. I had some vacation from the day job saved up, so I’m cranking through as much as I can while I still have inspiration.

#6

I’m still not exactly sure what I’m supposed to write in here, but I have good news (about the novel). Per suggestion from very dated books about publishing, I had been shopping the first few chapters around to agents and publishers for months, and of course, there were no takers. Something shifted with the new chapters, though, because I just signed a deal with a legitimate publisher to finish out this new novel. They’re champing at the bit, so I’m sending over new chapters as I finish them.

#7

Maybe the pressure is getting to me. I’m back at the day job (of course), so I’m writing early in the morning and every night. The new chapters aren’t as scary as they need to be, though, and I’m afraid to send them over. Maybe I just need to have more night terrors, right? Sarah says no.

#8

Just in time, I had another dream breakthrough. Nightmare breakthrough? I don't know. Either way, I just had this dream that was definitely in the same old house where Sarah said the mirrors were "wrong." She wasn't in this dream, though. Lucky her.

In the dream, I was exploring the old house, and I saw this old Jack-in-the-box sitting in the corner. The lid was closed, and it was covered in layers of dust that told me it had been in the house for a long time. It wasn't dirty, though. I remember that. It was just covered in dust, and I suspected that the spring had frozen up years ago. I thought it was odd, but I didn't want to get any closer to get a better look. I just walked to another room. After looking around, I saw the Jack-in-the-box in the corner of that room as well. It was still far away, and I kept looking around the house.

After a few more rooms, the generally creepy "nightmare" feeling sharpened into a distinct sense that there was a presence behind me. I spun around, and I saw the same toy. Just sitting there, but much closer. The lid was still closed, and there was no sign of "Jack" in the box. It felt wrong, though. I wanted to turn away again, but I saw the crank start turning on its own. I just freaked out. I could feel my heart racing. I knew I couldn't let it open, and I started trying to scream to wake myself up. Again, though, I had no voice and no breath to make a noise. I tried so hard to push a scream out, but I was completely mute. Right be-

fore the lid finally opened to release whatever was inside, my eyes shot open. The scream escaped my lungs in one final burst, and scared Sarah awake. Again. She was staring at me, and my heart was still racing so much in the real world that I couldn't even talk to her.

Anyway, I added a creepy Jack-in-the-box scene to my novel later in the morning, and Sarah agreed it was one of my best chapters. I guess that's progress.

#9

I keep writing. I guess this whole novel has taken over my subconscious pretty successfully because I'm definitely dreaming about it more. I see the house and new features almost every night, and it helps the early morning pages. Some days, I almost forget to stop and go to my real job.

#10

A new dream that will probably have pieces in the book, even though it changed location at least a little. I'm alone on an old pier jutting out over a small pond. Behind me, I can see the old, creepy house of the "wrong" mirrors and haunted Jack-in-the-boxes (Jacks-in-the-box?). I'm holding a piece of paper, but it's illegible. I've heard you can't read in your dreams, by the way; something about the language center in our brain being offline. Anyway, I hear the words, "These words are doors, built to keep him out." It keeps re-

peating until I wake up screaming, again. Sarah's concerned, but the line is good. It's weird and almost poetic. I have to put it in the story. I don't really know who "he" is, but he's part of the story now.

#11

I missed some work. Had to call in sick due to lack of sleep, but it's okay. I've gotten a lot of writing done. My publisher assigned me an editor to go over everything as I send it in, and they love the new pages. She's been showing them around, and everybody calls them "captivating."

#16

More dreams. I can't remember going to sleep, but the dreams still come. I'm always in or near the house with the mirrors that are wrong, and the Jack-in-the-box that haunts me, and the small body of water where he waits, or maybe he's in one of the rooms, because there are so many doors in the old house, even though it looks small from the outside, there must be so many rooms, and I hate them all, but I keep exploring and finding new terrors for my story, because it is my story, now; it's not the story I created, but the story of me, and I must finish it.

#22

The novel is almost done. Soon, I won't need the dreams.

#27

These words are doors, built to keep him out. These words are doors, built to keep him out. These words are doors, built to keep him out. These words are doors. These words are doors. These words are doors. Keep him out. Keep him out.

Keep him.

#35

Sarah's gone.

#35.1

She's still in my dreams, but the dream Sarah is angry now. The real one left a note: "There was something wrong with the mirrors."

#58

I was wrong. The dreams haven't stopped. There is something wrong with the words I wrote, and reading them makes more dreams come. I think Sarah was having the dreams, too. I need to warn my editor.

#58.1

It's too late. They loved the final pages. They said they couldn't stop reading. They like the dreams. They said he will cleanse us.

#66

They rushed to get the ebook up. So many have been reading the words. I don't know what I have unleashed.

#74

The police came to ask about Sarah. I told them she was gone. I told them about the dreams.

#98

We didn't keep him out. I opened the door through the words he gave me in my dreams. His dreams? It doesn't matter. The lid is opening now.