

Darkness Brings to Bear

By Matthew Wilson

Garridan sits at the desk in his second-floor office sipping whiskey while scribbling feverishly on a pad. It's just about 11:30pm and, from the look of things, he won't be wrapping up anytime soon. His leg bounces restlessly under the desk beside a German Shepherd whining for attention that he is not likely to receive in this moment.

Garridan's head rises reluctantly in response to a low, grumbling noise coming from out in the yard below his open window. His face reveals that this is not a sound unfamiliar to him, though he had been hoping not to hear it. He ignores it momentarily, redirecting his attention to his near-empty whiskey glass, taking a long, slow sip as he resentfully continues to listen. The sound soon repeats. A muffled male voice. There are some nearly discernible words being spoken, but he cannot quite make them out at a distance.

After a few tense moments, Garridan makes his way downstairs and into the kitchen, his German Shepard following close behind. He approaches a window beside the sink that looks out over the yard and cautiously peers out into the night. An unidentifiable shape passes across his view in the darkness. He flicks the outside floodlight on which immediately exposes a human figure walking the yard, though it remains on the perimeter of the lit area, mostly out of view.

Garridan rationally confirms that there is an intruder out there moving about his property, and so he discreetly phones the police. He then closes the window and moves to the living room, where he sits motionlessly as he awaits their arrival, which comes shortly as he lives not but a few blocks from the local station.

The two responding officers introduce themselves and question Garridan briefly before proceeding to their investigation of the property. They inspect the first and second floors of the house, then move out into the yard where they mill about the perimeter, shining their flashlights into the surrounding trees for several minutes. They find nothing to report. Before leaving, the officers tell Garridan to contact the station again if the problem recurs.

Moments later, while Garridan is agitatedly relieving himself in the bathroom adjacent to the kitchen, he hears

indistinguishable words being spoken in the yard once more. The lower frequencies of the voice rumble through the wall as though whoever is speaking stands right on the other side.

He returns to the kitchen window and looks out across his yard. In the clear view of the floodlight, Garridan sees a man standing about twenty feet from him, facing the house. They lock eyes, and Garridan is struck forcefully by the sight of what appears to be *himself* standing there staring back at him. The mysterious figure looks exactly like Garridan, but with a lifeless expression, darkened eyes, and a menace difficult to describe. Garridan has little time to process the appearance of this figure in the flash of seconds that pass before he instinctively breaks their gaze and retreats.

Incredibly disturbed, Garridan shrinks away, hiding beside the window where he knows he will not be seen by this dark, approaching twin. Minutes pass. His dog stands staring at the window. Suddenly, the dog's ears perk up and he begins to growl deeply. Garridan sees the unusually-transparent shadow of this mysterious figure on the floor of the kitchen as it stands at the window. It is barely moving, but it remains there. As Garridan looks to his phone resting on the counter and contemplates stepping quickly into the view of this dark twin to retrieve it, the window begins to slide open.

The figure says, in Garridan's own voice,

"The act has not been completed."

Garridan says nothing in response, frozen in place and overwhelmed with fear. The German Shepard turns and flees to the living room with his tail tucked between his legs.

The figure at the window continues.

"This past evil *must* be revisited."

Garridan begins to tremble. After a few seconds, a look of painful knowing creeps across his face. With noticeable effort, he forces the thought from his mind and shakes his head.

"Leave me be," he yells hoarsely toward the window.

The mysterious figure standing in the yard leans into the window.

"For your own sake, I cannot."

Garridan remains in place as he continues to listen, hoping this mysterious twin will either explain himself or eventually leave.

It continues.

"This sin that you hide from and deny like a coward will be your undoing if you do not step out from the shadows to face it. I am here to help you, Garridan."

With this, the figure slowly retreats from the window, Garridan watching as the semi-opaque shadow disappears from the kitchen floor. He remains immobile, his mind racing, eyes searching the room. He covers his face with his hands and begins to sob quietly.

After several minutes of frantic deliberation, Garridan exits the front door of his home. He scans the yard and the driveway as he makes his way to his car, but sees no trace of his dark twin. As he reaches the car, he sees that it is already sitting in the back seat, motionless and waiting. Garridan opens the door, takes a deep, choppy breath and gets in. It's clear that he is being compelled by something dire, but important.

Garridan checks the rearview mirror incessantly, but catches only fleeting glimpses of his dark twin as they pass below the rare streetlight on the dark, rural road. He eventually gathers his courage and addresses his silent passenger.

"What are you?"

The dark twin meets Garridan's panicked stare in the mirror, but offers no words in response.

The car soon slows to a stop on a narrow bridge. Garridan looks out his window and locks his sight on the guardrail that lines the length of the bridge's footpath beside the road. His dark twin soon comes into view and stands at the guardrail, facing out into the darkness beyond it. Garridan did not hear him exit the vehicle, the realization of which sends a nervous shiver through him. He watches the mysterious figure with apprehension for a moment before doing the same.

They stand on the old, lonely bridge, staring down at the water flowing below. The silence between them is soon broken by the dark twin.

"What happened two nights passed did not end here. While you avoided the reality of what transpired, your problem traveled downstream on the gentle river, through the tall grass, over deadfall, now nearing a well-traveled road."

Panic fills Garridan's body as he realizes why this dark twin has been visiting him. He again asks...

"What are you?"

Again giving no answer, the dark twin turns and begins walking towards the woods off to the side of the bridge.

Garridan follows as they travel along the shore of the river. They move slowly and quietly, eventually straying from the riverbed and breaching the treeline. They follow a path of broken, flattened grass into the dark forest.

After what feels to Garridan like miles, his dark twin stops at a sharp decline in the land and points downward to the bottom of the hill. Garridan approaches and looks down, but is unable to see anything in the darkness. He grabs hold of a nearby branch in order to get a better angle looking downward. The branch snaps off and, as Garridan reestablishes his balance, a voice, faint and weak, ascends the hill from below.

"My God. Please help me."

Garridan freezes. He looks to his dark twin, who is evidently musing on the uncommon situation in which they now find themselves.

"He knows we are here... We stand here above this helpless being in the desolation of the woods, perhaps his last chance at salvation, and yet we are not here to save."

With this, the mysterious figure begins down the hill. Garridan follows after a moment of frenzied contemplation. As he nears, he is able to see his dark twin standing over a battered and depleted man - lying on the ground, bloody, covered in mud, and barely conscious.

Garridan reaches the bottom of the hill and stands a few feet from the downed man. He looks to his dark twin who stands staring down at the man in the dim light of the moon. The injured man manages to roll onto his back in order to see his rescuers. Blood creeps into his throat in the process. He turns his head and spits it onto the ground beside him, then fixes his

eyes on Garridan, seemingly as yet unaware of the mysterious figure standing nearer to him.

"I can barely breathe... Please..." he sputters, weakly coughing up more blood.

Garridan looks to his dark twin, who is now staring back at him with a motionless intensity.

"This is not who I am."

His dark twin responds with a grin.

"This is exactly who you are... And even if you don't believe that, this is who you need to be in this moment."

Garridan rubs his face and begins pacing. The injured man on the ground between him and his dark twin groans as he slips in and out of consciousness.

"What am I supposed to do?" Garridan asks, desperately.

"You've already denied him much with your careless act and your negligence. All that is left to deny him is the last thing he requires to remain a problem to you."

The dark twin looks down at the injured man once more. He focuses on the man's chest, laboriously rising and falling coupled with the sound of obstructed air squeezing through his esophagus.

Garridan asks... "Is that supposed to be simple?"

"To you, no, it should not be simple, but its truth and the need for the action should be plainly so, especially now."

Garridan draws closer to the man, but he continues to hesitate.

His dark twin continues...

"Unless this is a great moment of change for you - where you choose to stop putting your interests before those of the rest of the world and finally find your way to humility... Is that what is happening here?"

Garridan looks with disdain at this mysterious being who seems to know him as he knows himself, only more honestly. He IS scared. He DOES hide. And if he wants the continued

comfort that safety provides, then he will have to follow the advice being presented, as disagreeable as it is to hear.

He stands over the injured man, who is now settled into unconsciousness. He slowly lowers himself down and mounts the man. His hands move hesitantly toward the man's throat.

His dark twin again offers encouragement.

"Let's be done with this ordeal. A moment of brutality more and we move forward, untethered."

Garridan bites down on his lips painfully and begins strangling the man, who snaps back to life and attempts to fight him off. The man grabs Garridan's arms, but is too weak to stop what is happening to him. Still, he tries. This goes on for a few moments. Even in his weakened state, the man scratches at Garridan's face, his will to live causing this to take longer than Garridan could ever have expected. The man's mangled legs will not allow him to stand, but as long as Garridan is within his reach, he is able to fight for his life with surprising ferocity.

At a loss, Garridan again looks to his dark twin.

"I can't do this."

"You have to finish it, Garridan. Now!"

The dark twin takes a few steps and places his foot up on a large rock. He taps his foot several times atop the rock and grins.

"End it quickly, then."

Garridan stands. The injured man rolls onto his stomach and begins to bear-crawl away. Garridan wipes the blood from his scratched face, approaches his dark twin and lifts the large rock with a grunt. He walks it over to the fleeing man, raises it up over his head, and closes his eyes tightly.. The rock comes down forcefully - and the physical struggle is ended.

Garridan trudges forward, carrying the man's limp body over his shoulder as he follows his dark twin, who is again musing darkly.

"Problems come and go... the minor ones, at least, but the major ones take time to alleviate. The effort spent dealing with them leaves marks on us... In us. We rarely get the opportunity to rid ourselves of them cleanly – to be what we would have been had the problem never existed."

Garridan's dark twin offers him this vague ideation, but the experience of having taken a life has had a profound impact on him. He walks on, near-catatonic, and does not respond.

As they approach a swampy area, Garridan stops walking and drops the body.

"I trust that when this is over, you won't have any more reason to visit me?"

"That's right. We will never have to look at each other again," responds the dark twin.

Garridan hoists the body up again and continues following his dark twin into the marsh.

Moments later, they move through waist-deep water, headed toward a massive tree with dark, sprawling roots. The dark twin stops in front of it and waits. He points downward, to where the roots reach out widely into the water.

The early morning light begins to make its way over the nearby hilltop as Garridan approaches. He lowers the body into the murky water and submerges it. He begins working the man's body into the underwater roots, forcing the limbs between the growths and securing him into what has been chosen for him as his final, watery resting place.

As he finishes, Garridan wipes the sweat, blood and grime from his face. Panting heavily, he begins walking out of the marsh without regarding his dark twin.

Garridan works his way back through the forest, retracing his steps outward, his dark twin now following behind him just as he had followed the mysterious figure into this ordeal. The dark twin remains faithfully in step with Garridan, but moves almost unnoticeably closer to him as they proceed.

The lonely old bridge comes into view. Garridan sighs with marginal relief and continues on at a boosted pace.

Moments later, Garridan stands alone beside his car. His eyes have darkened, his expression is lifeless, with a menace difficult to describe as he opens the door, gets in, and drives away.