My Own Worst Enemy

By: Roderick Pope

I can never seem to outrun or escape him. No matter where I go, or where I hide, whenever I look over my shoulder, he’s always there. He mirrors my actions and mocks my words. I once believed my only escape was to run further and faster, but it doesn’t make a difference; he always catches up.

Years ago, I believed I could ignore him; exiling him, ambitious he’d lose hope and abandon his hunt for me. I was wrong. His lust for my misery continued, preying on the precise moment where my path diverged. On the left was happiness, and on the right, hardship. My heart urged me left, but my feet carried me right. I wanted happiness. I wanted to reach the light at the end of the tunnel, but I continued down the steps into the abyss of sorrow. I looked back up towards the light, wishing I could go, but he pushed me further down and whispered, “You don’t deserve it.”

My shadow drug me around, thrusting me back and forth. Many times, he would tightly grasp my neck and bring me to my knees. I could feel the life leaving my body, but as I gasped my last breath, he relinquished his grip, and retreated into the shadows. I guess it’s hard to play with your favorite toy once it breaks.

Unable to help myself, I sought outside help. She was a beacon of light that entered the battlefield wielding her newly sharpened pen and clipboard shield. Once a week, she banished him to the shadows, forcing him to cower within the darkness, bloody, bruised and on the brink of death. While she patrolled the battlefield, my own worst enemy retreated and licked his wounds, waiting in anticipation for her to leave. He bid his time and once she did, my torment began again. This back and forth war carried on for years, with no foreseeable end.

I was slowly losing the battle for my soul. I found outside help, but the war was lost. My warrior kept my enemy at bay, but her strength wasn’t enough. If I was going to stand a chance, I needed to seek salvation. I looked above, feeling a ray of hope surge within me. For the first time in years, the darkness left me. For a year, my burdens were erased. I walked tall and proud; no longer hunched over and reclusive. I saw the world as a beautiful blue ball of hope; no longer as the gloomy prison with a cell I once occupied. I felt freedom. My shackles eradicated and the strings my enemy once pulled, cut. I didn’t feel his presence. He was defeated, and naively, I believed forever. But the more light you cast, the longer and darker the shadows become.

He swiftly crept upon me again; striking me when I perceived myself to be fully free. Within days he replaced my shackles and demonstrated his true power. Before my eyes, he tarnished relationships, set fire to my passions, severed my ties with my warrior and savior, and plunged me back into the darkness. He replenished the fear I suppressed long ago, and once again, lurked over my shoulder.

I returned to my old habits, believing this time it could help me escape him. I ran. I nearly outran him on several occasions before, but I was out of practice. My lungs gasped for air, my legs grew tired and weary, and negative thoughts circled my mind.

“It’s hopeless,” one said.

“You’re worthless,” another responded.

“Weak!”

“Pathetic!”

“Friendless!”

“Spineless!”

I slowed and hunched over; my chest rising and falling rapidly. He defeated me; again. What was the point? No matter what solution I tried, he always found me and wreaked havoc on my life. I turned to others for help, but their comfort was only temporary. It brought me relief, but they weren’t the solutions I perceived them to be. If seeking help from the outside wasn’t beneficial, seeking it from within must be the answer.

I took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. I straightened, turned and saw him, standing across the way. I took a step back and he took a step forward. Fear was beginning to creep back inside me. No, enough is enough. I’ve been running from him for years and facing him was long overdue.

I walked towards him, and he towards me. Our walks turned into sprints and I’d never felt so terrified and thrilled. My fingers tingled and my pupils dilated! My heart beat fast and my lungs full. Fear and excitement clinged to me like a wet shirt and I couldn’t help but smile. His grip over me loosened and tightened all at once. My fear transferred itself to him. No longer was I prey, but hunter.

The distance shortened between us until we each slowed to a stop. We were only steps from each other, but I couldn’t make out his face. A large hood shrouded it, but something was familiar about him. We took a couple steps forward, only inches of space between us. A could feel fear radiating off him, trying to influence me, but it wasn’t going to work this time. I gripped his hood and flung it from his head. I was staring into the face of my own worst enemy: me.