

December 1954

One of the more normal aspects of my younger years was my paper route. Yes, this unusual fellow you have been reading about, with his visions and daytrips through the inner worlds and angelic guardians, was actually a paperboy, just like the one who tossed newspapers on to your front porch. My papers were dropped off at the corner, so I had to pick them up, fold them, stuff them in my bag, then tread my route, summer or winter, rain or shine.

This incident occurred on a cold Thursday morning in December. I arose at 5 A.M. in order to have the entire route finished by 6:30. The morning was cold, dark, depressing, and perhaps a little frightening, as I would sit beneath the corner streetlamps to fold my papers. Of course, these were the 1950's, so the danger of being a ten or twelve year old out on the street in the pre-dawn hours was much less than today.

Nor did I encounter very many problems of any kind during my years as a deliverer of journalistic fare, no encounters with dog fangs, speeding automobiles, or umbrellas wielded by deranged old women. But of course, a threat does not have to be in the three-dimensional world in order to be very real; the dimly lit streets of early morning can conjure a host of potential threats out of a stimulated imagination.

On this particular morning, as I was minding my own business folding my newspapers, I caught sight of a man walking towards me. Although I had seen some strange things in the early hours of other mornings, this figure was something different. Attired in black overcoat and a black hat pulled down over his face, I wasn't able to get a proper look at him until he passed beneath the streetlight.

His face had an indefinably strange quality about it and I was a little trepidatious, but he did not seem menacing in any way, so I shrugged it off and continued working on the papers. Without warning, the man stepped out into the street and that's when the adventure began, with my noticing what looked to be hundreds of snakes protruding from beneath the hem of his long coat. Their appearance seemed to shift from multi-colored to a combination of gray and dark green, a contrast to his own red eyes.

I was rooted to the spot with fear, my rubbery legs refused to run or even move. The already unnerving event took a turn for the worse when he removed his hat and emitted the screech of an owl. He then opened his coat, revealing a distinctly avian form. I had no idea whether he was manifesting the feathers of a bird or whether it was an optical illusion within an illusion but I did have the feeling that this thing, whatever it was, was experiencing difficulty keeping its form together, as though the cloak were the only thing preventing him from melting into the early morning darkness. The snakes were then released from him and they appeared to be under his mental control.

I would later have other encounters with similar creatures and no matter what form they assumed, dogs, wolves, ghosts, angels, or what have you, there was something of a consistency with the

red eyes, as though they were part of the uniform. Those who took the shape of a human most often were devoid of noses and mouths but they always had those two unforgettable eyes dominating the triangular faces with slightly pointed chins, almost as though they were designed to resemble masks.

The apparition began to move directly towards me and once more the spirit was willing but the flesh unresponsive in the matter of running for my life. As he drew nearer, his serpentine attendants were writing about him. They did not display at viciousness nor did they attempt to attack me. If anything, they seemed to be there for his protection.

His eyes looked down into the very depths of my being, uniting his consciousness with mine. I felt as though I were one with the universe itself as he spoke, in a very calm voice, "Welcome to Zelcon." * Then he faded away.

Welcome to Zelcon? What was Zelcon? To be truthful, it sounded like a medication.

It was only many years later that I would actually discover the meaning of Zelcon but at the time I was absolutely baffled. One thing I did know was that the effect of his words relieved all the tension of the episode and I was able to move again. As though nothing out of the ordinary had occurred, I got up and went about my paper route, somehow instilled with a new confidence. I delivered my papers as usual, but I knew there was something different about me; I no longer felt alone.

When I arrived home, the wonderfully homey smell of eggs and bacon re-established my contact with the normal world. My mother sensed something, asking me if I was all right. I distractedly answered in the affirmative and went off to my room to get ready for another school day.

While washing up in the bathroom, I caught sight of what I thought was a dark green snake wriggling out from under my bed. I took a closer look, but found nothing under there but very pedestrian balls of dust. I continued looking around, prompting my brother to enquire as to the nature of my quest. Of course, I did not know he was there and his sudden interrogative made me jump. I gave him my usual answer to my mother's questions, "Nothing," and returned to my hygiene.

Fortunately Dad had already left for work so we had breakfast without him, a break for me in that state of mind, as the morning's events had not surprisingly left some lingering residue in my consciousness. My daydreaming was cut short by mother's admonition not to play with my food and to get a move on with eating, as it was already 7:30.

Mom was always harping about my daydreaming, prompted by my teachers' steady stream of reports that I was paying less than acceptable attention in my various classes. Of course, what they thought was mental wandering was really the after effects of seizures, but since the establishment of my condition as epilepsy lay years in the future, its effects had to be scapegoated to other causes.

“Finish your breakfast. Have you done your homework? Did you put your clothes away?” On and on she went with her relentless questioning, which caused tears to break forth and course down my face.

The mother gave way to the inquisitor and she wiped the tears from my face as we did our by now almost farcical what’s wrong/nothing routine.

While Mom was cleaning my face, she looked deeply into my eyes and there observed something that was more than startling judging by the expression of fear she was wearing. I not only saw her fear; I could actually feel it. She had seen something disturbing, but what? She said nothing about it and I did not enquire. All she did was tell me to get my jacket and get ready to leave.

She remained silent as she drove me to school, dropping me off at the curb and driving away. Her behavior made me feel confused, frightened. In a word, normal.