# Cloak and Danger

The Survival Files — Case 44 — ESS = 267

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Vincent and Ivan Idanowicz lived in the house of their employer, Joseph Kronhelm. One November day in 1894, Vincent[1] traveled to the nearby town of Gajsin seeking a new fur cloak to keep the Russian winters at bay. While he considered various fabrics in the shop of Izloma Sierota, the tailor brought out an almost new cloak that, he said, had belonged to a gentleman named Lassota. The low asking price of 45 rubles convinced Vincent to buy this cloak instead of ordering a new one, and he went home with his purchase, pleased with the bargain he had gotten.

That night, however, Vincent was awakened from a sound sleep by "a gentleman dressed in black." Even though the door to the bedroom was locked, and his brother slept undisturbed nearby, Vincent felt only surprise, not fear. The visitor warned Vincent to return the cloak immediately as it was infested with tuberculosis bacteria. The cloak had come, he said, from a judge who had recently died of TB, not from Mr. Lassota, as the tailor had claimed. And then, the visitor simply vanished.

Vincent woke up his brother, who only laughed at his story. And, since a careful check revealed no way that anyone could have entered the bedroom, Vincent came to accept that he had experienced a hallucination. He spoke not a word of the vision throughout the following day. That night, however, the visitor came again. This time, the brothers were discussing family matters when the man in black came banging through the door and said: "You are both awake. Well, this time, Mr. Vincent, you will not say that my appearance yesterday was a hallucination. I come, therefore, to repeat to you: Go and ask Mr. Kronhelm to allow you to go to Gajsin tomorrow, and return the fur to Sierota, who is deceiving you in saying that it belonged to Mr. Lassota. I repeat that it belonged to a judge, who died of tuberculosis at Gajsin. It is infected with tuberculosis bacilli. I was a Government official at Lipowice, and died there in 1892; but as my mission is to watch over you, I warn you of what will happen if you do not follow my advice." So saying, the apparition vanished.

Kronhelm reports that he was awakened at 5:00 a.m. by two pale and frightened brothers. Upon hearing their story, he decided to accompany them to Gajsin.

When questioned by the three men, the tailor insisted that he had been truthful when he told Vincent that he had bought the cloak from a Mr. Lassota. So, the trio went to see the current judge at Gajsin, who confirmed that his predecessor had died of tuberculosis, but knew nothing about his effects. The judge directed them to a dealer in second-hand goods named Fonkonogy. This man told Kronhelm that he had bought all the effects of the late judge, except for a fur cloak, which had been bought by the tailor, Sierota. The men showed him the fur cloak and he recognized it at once. Later he signed a written affirmation of his testimony.

Written statements were also signed by both of the brothers and by the priest in attendance at the judge's death. The details of the events were first revealed by Kronhelm and later investigated by members of the Society for Psychical Research. The case was presented by Alice Johnson.[2]

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[1] We'll use first names for ease of distinguishing between the brothers Idanowicz.

[2] Johnson was organizing secretary of the SPR from 1903 to 1916, research officer from 1908 to 1916, and editor of the society's Proceedings from 1899 to 1916.

What happened to the cloak, or to the tailor, was never reported.

Discussion

Johnson's super-cautious approach was typical of the early SPR members. In her attempts to offer explanations other than Survival, she repeatedly piles "might be's" on top of "could have's" on top of "may have's"; cobbling together arguments so unlikely and ungainly as to be laughable. An example of this is her suggestion that Vincent "may have" been in the habit of visiting Gajsin, and that the judge "may have" been pointed out to him, and "could have" been wearing the cloak, and it "might have" some identifying mark, that Vincient's subconscious mind "may have" registered and so "might have" recognized, and something in the tailor's manner "might have" seemed suspicious, and then, in response to all that, Vincent's subconscious "could have" created an elaborate dramatic presentation (*i.e.* the ghost).

But even if every one of these assumptions were not completely unfounded, they fail to explain three things: (1) how Vincent's subconscious linked the cloak to tuberculosis, (2) why the ghost was of a complete stranger rather than the judge himself or someone Vincent trusted,[3] and (3) how it was that brother Ivan saw and heard the same apparition.

For Further Information

"A Case of Information Supernormally Acquired" by Alice Johnson, *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. 12, 1896-97, pages 116-126.

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[3] Regarding the visitor's identity, Johnson points to the lack of verification of the name it gave and she suggests that the case is somehow weakened thereby. But spirits are known to adapt an image and name acceptable to their audience. Who they "really are" could well interfere with the reception of their message. If, for example, the spirit had admitted that he was a Hindu, or a Cherokee, or something equally outlandish to someone raised in the Greek Orthodox church, its warning would most likely have never been heeded.