



Sleep Demons: An Insomniac's Memoir

Bill Hayes

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Bill Hayes grew up in a family in which the question "How'd you sleep?" was as much a staple at the breakfast table as orange juice or coffee, a question that encouraged genuine reflection and, as it turns out for the author, a legacy of life-shaping implications. If there's such a thing as an insomnia gene, he tells us at the outset of this beautifully written memoir, my father passed it on to me, along with his green eyes and Irish melancholy.

Bill Hayes' life as an insomniac is rooted in the wry trappings of irony: his father ran a Coca-Cola factory, of all things. I've often wondered if all that sugar and caffeine altered my neurochemical makeup. Moving seamlessly to and from his present vantage point in San Francisco, Hayes' narrative affords an intimate look at one man's singular journey through contemporary life -- from his sleep-disturbed childhood through his sleepwalking in adolescence to the height of his insomnia, when his partner struggles with AIDS and Hayes must face an increasingly troubling and debilitating sleep disorder.

Along the way, armed with an infectious curiosity and an obsession with the mysteries of his personal demons, Hayes leads us on a fascinating exploration of disorders such as sleep-talking, narcolepsy, and sleep apnea and contends with all manner of theories and experimentation, from the conceptions of sleep in ancient mythology to today's state-of-the-art sleeping aids and clinics.

As with desire, sleep resists pursuit. It must come find you. Nevertheless, I look for it. This powerful book is the result of Bill Hayes' lifelong search for sleep.

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George Clark:

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