

Introduction

Anything can be scary at night.

Floorboards cooling and creaking. A shadow cast by a piece of furniture. A raccoon in the trash.

When we can't see something, our imagination goes into overtime, with the inevitable result that the threats we conjure in our mind's eye are much more frightening than the reality we see with our physical eyes once we flip on that lightswitch.

Darkness acts as a sort of Pandora's box — Schrödinger's steel chamber — Nietzsche's abyss — the psychological black box of the mind. That is, we know that something unpleasant could be lurking where we can't see it, but as long as the box remains closed, we are frightened but unharmed.

As long as we close our eyes and pull the covers over our head, we tremble but feel safe. We are comforted by our superstitious belief that what we can't see can't hurt us.

As long as we don't see them, the world's evils will remain confined; the cat will be alive; the trauma will be nothing but a bad dream; and the monster out there will be nothing more than the wind rattling the windows, after all.

Ignorance might be frightening, but it offers plausible denial.

It's only after we open our eyes — turn on the light, peek inside the box, gaze into the abyss — that the damage is done. Evil escapes, the cat's fate is sealed, the repressed trauma returns — the monster turns and meets our eyes.

In Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay on "The Uncanny," he quotes Schelling's definition "of the uncanny as something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light," or, in Freud's psychoanalytic understanding of the world, something once known but repressed is pushing its way back into our consciousness again, bringing with it feelings of fear and anxiety.

In other words, the moment we experience as being uncanny is that moment in which we see that which should not have been seen or we realize that which should not have been realized.

It is that moment in which our reality turns upside-down as we're forced to reinterpret everything we thought we understood about reality or ourselves in the light — and of course there *must* be light — of our horrible, gut-wrenching new knowledge.

Every horror story revolves around such an unfortunate revelation: seeing the contents of the ancient tomb that shouldn't have been opened; comprehending the lore in the forbidden tome that shouldn't have been read; discerning the origin of the mysterious noise that shouldn't have been investigated; comprehending the truth about the mysterious stranger who shouldn't have been approached; remembering the childhood event that should have stayed forgotten.

It isn't the darkness you should fear; it's the light. Because you can keep denying the monster exists until that dire moment that you finally see it.

And when you see it, it is all too likely to see you, too.

To see, to name, to know, is to become vulnerable. If you keep the lights off, the door closed, the box shut, you'll be safe. At least, you'll be safe up until that final, dreadful moment in which your curiosity or fear becomes so great that you finally peek.

And there the monster is, right before your eyes, sending a hopeless shiver down your spine as your mind rebels against the dreadful truth.

And in that moment, your world is changed forever.

In myth, the price of knowledge is often the loss of the sight that won it. Oedipus, confronted with the horrible truth of his actions, tears out his eyes; Tiresias, privy to forbidden knowledge, loses his sight; Wotan, to gain wisdom, sacrifices an eye; Rapunzel's prince, seeing the witch, falls backward and is blinded by the thorns at the bottom of the tower.

Of course, those are the lucky ones. The unlucky ones lost their life: The heroes who sought to defeat Medusa; the hunter Acteon who gazed at naked Artemis; Lot's wife who turned back to watch Sodom's destruction.

They should have kept their eyes closed and stayed huddled up safely in the dark, hoping that dawn never came.

Maybe, just maybe, they would have been safe.

Just as, maybe, just maybe, *you'd* be safe if you stopped reading now.

Because if you continue to read, you'll be opening yourself up to the same perils they faced. You'll watch dark pacts made and broken, witness terrible crimes committed and punished, learn about malevolent forces natural and monstrous, and see humans' deepest fears, regrets, and obsessions return to destroy them.

All taking place in the unrelenting, unforgiving, undeniable, unavoidable light of day.

What follows are *Day Terrors*.

Don't say you weren't warned.

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