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2019 Conference

Feb 28th, 1:15 PM

Nyctophobia: A Tale of the Girl Who Stayed Up Later Than Vampires

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Barrett, Oriana, "Nyctophobia: A Tale of the Girl Who Stayed Up Later Than Vampires" (2019). *Making Literature Conference*. 1.

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Oriana Barrett

Nyctophobia: A Tale of the Girl Who Stayed Up Later Than Vampires

.1.

“At night I hear it creeping

At night I feel it move

I'll never sleep here anymore.”

-Scared by Three Days Grace-

My sister, Caitlyn, and I used to share one of the only two rooms on the second floor of our house. We each had twin beds on opposite sides of the wall. It was the biggest room in the house second only to the basement that wasn't finished until after my brother's birth. And, the closet was a literal walk in closet with two wooden sliding doors. However, I always found our bedroom to be eerie from an early age. There was something about the way I could peer over the side of my bed towards the doorway into my dad's office when it was pure dark that always had my stomach twisting into knots. I used to tell myself that with my dad in the house, nothing would dare to lurk in the darkness, but I could see outlines of things that weren't really there. I could hear the house settling in on itself late at night. And, I used to wake up early in the morning around three o'clock, which is considered the witching hour. Caitlyn fast asleep would never wake up as I studied the darkness to come up with something reasonable to explain why I couldn't go back to sleep. Of course, there wasn't ever anything actually present in the room besides my sister. Yet, I got into the habit of sleeping with a pillow over my head after watching more and more vampire films.

There was a crawlspace in the back of my closet. I used to think that a coffin laid in it, and a vampire, not a beautiful one like Kaname Kuran from the anime, Vampire Knight, but an ugly one like the vampire from the Animal Planet's Lost Tapes series, was sleeping in a nest waiting to sneak out of the closet at night. Admittedly, I started to start reading more R.L. Stine's Fear Street and

watching any horror movie that I could get my hands on during this time. It was around this age, I started taking naps at my daycare after school instead of sleeping at home. I couldn't stop picturing creatures coming to get me. And, I even had the displeasure of sleep terrors and hallucinations in general.

One night, I stayed over at my Aunt Mitchell's house and had to share a bed with my younger cousin, McKenzie. She always tended to sprawl her legs out and take all the covers making it hard to sleep in the same bed. So, I awoke around my usual time meaning that everyone including my Aunt Mitchell were still asleep. I went to go use the restroom since it seemed like the smart thing to do. I crawled around McKenzie's legs before going towards the closet, which was right next to the door. That's when I noticed the lumbering shadow casted across the closet. It breathed and had an ape-like appearance to it making me realize quickly that what I was seeing wasn't my own shadow. I had to look behind at McKenzie sleeping to know for sure that it wasn't her shadow either. Deciding not to go to the bathroom, I crawled back in bed and threw the covers over my head after checking back at the closet where the shadow still remained. I refused to look towards the shadow and fell asleep until I awoke the next day to my uncle's footsteps in the hallway. To this day, I can picture the shadow. However, I know that there wasn't anything actually there. If I had been able to wake McKenzie, she would have told me to shut up and go back to sleep. So, it's a pointless fear.

.2.

"Monsters and bed sheets to creep.

While underneath my bed.

It bears me speak about these problems.

I've yet to find these monsters read my mind.

With ears and eyes to paralyze demise."

-Start to Fall by Get Scared-

Fear is caused by the change in the flow of blood in order to focus it on your arms and legs. As our hearts beat faster to supply as much oxygen into our muscles, we're designed to overcome whatever threats are coming our way. Our reasoning is reduced to the point that we can no longer rationalize as humans, but as primitive creatures. This is not to say that everyone in a terrifying situation can't be smart. It just means that our bodies are made to either fight to the death or to run away screaming like those blonde bimbos from B-rated horror films. Though, I've been told by Caitlyn that I fear driving and things that occur every day, which I can directly link back to my Social Anxiety Disorder. According to clinical researchers, most people with anxiety disorders deal with something known as "anxiety sensitivity", which just means that my body begins to panic before a situation even happens thus causing me to avoid it altogether. While I feared the darkness even up to now, it's become worse.

By the age of nineteen, I began sleeping on the couch in the family room instead of my bedroom because the upstairs had horrible heating vents making it too cold or hot depending on the weather outside. I kept the TV on at night as white noise due to my house being sixty-seven years old and constantly settling in on itself. One night, I woke up to the sound of breathing. When I opened my eyes, a dark blue male face stared back at me. I laid there frozen for what felt like at least a second and blinked to find the image gone. Trembling, I remembered falling back asleep slowly unable to explain what had just happened. The next night, it was a giant spider coming down from just beside the ceiling fan onto me. I yelped loud enough that my mom ran into the room expecting to find someone breaking into the house. However, she just found me on the couch crying and begging her to remove the blanket since I thought for sure that the spider disappeared underneath the covers. She pulled it back to reveal nothing.

Sleep terrors are described as when an individual, usually a child, wakes up screaming/shouting while thrashing around. It takes a while for them to recover, and it looks a lot like an anxiety or panic attack from the outside. On the inside, it's like being awake to view something threatening looming over your body while you're unable to move. It's being able to feel the threat there, but not being able to do anything about it. There's no way to prepare for it. My sleep terrors always occur when I'm dealing with too much stress in my life, and I can never tell how much stress causes it. No one else in my family have sleep terrors. The only thing close is my dad's nightmares about water (something that came from his time in the military when he jumped out of a plane at night only to find himself hitting a rock, which was the only thing that saved him from a horrible death by drowning). So, sleep terrors couldn't possibly be something heredity like alcoholism or other bad habits. Though, this makes me wonder why sleep terrors exist. Studies have shown they occurred in young children, yet I only remember two times in my childhood when I had anything similar to sleep terrors. One was the shadow on the wall of McKenzie's closet. The other was the time I awoke to the shadow of a raccoon munching away beside my pillow. This makes me believe that sleep terrors can occur in people no matter what age they might be.

The last time I had a sleep terror, it was April when I had every single project due in one of my education classes all at once. Since I waited until the last minute to do most of these projects, I stayed up passed four o'clock in the morning. I finally turned the last project in and could get a good night's rest. So, I went to bed shortly before midnight. My roommate at the time, Hannah, had also fell asleep around the same time, a rare occurrence since we tended to stay up until one due to school work and stress.

I found myself suddenly awake, the lights had been turned off. The only light came from the street lamps in the quad area. I turned on my side in time to watch a black figure dart underneath my lofted bed. Jolting upwards, I glanced over towards Hannah, who I could faintly see peacefully

sleeping. I didn't know who would be in our room, but the door usually wasn't locked unless we both happened to be off campus. Working up the courage to peer underneath the edge of my bed, I only saw the partially opened window and my desk space. No one could hide under my desk since the chair still remained pushed in. Lying back down, I took a deep breath before curling up into a ball trying to forget the whole thing happened. Though, I trembled just thankful I hadn't seen another dark blue face standing over me.

.3.

"Like last night, they are not like tremors,

they are worse than tremors,

they are these terrors."

-Sleep by My Chemical Romance-

Being a junior in college, I find that most of my days start later with my classes all scheduled back to back, Monday to Friday. Then, I drive all the way back home on the weekends to work as a cashier at CVS. I usually don't have many free days to myself meaning I'm stressed out as there are days that my things to do expands with not just classes, but the stuff that happens off campus such as planning for work on the weekends or spending time with my immediate family. While I picked up counseling on Mondays, I still find myself unable to sleep well. I've gotten into the habit of slowly turning the lights off in my room until I'm left in darkness. Even as the shadows move along the ceiling, I rationalize it with every single light entering through the crack of my curtains. Some nights when I watch or read something pertaining to horror, I leave my purple lights on so that I no longer have to deal with the pitch darkness. Though, I still sleep with my pillow over my head and swallow a dose of 3 milligrams, 6 on nights when I really can't seem to sleep at all. Since I rather hear something than complete silence, I've gotten into the habit of falling asleep listening to the sound of rain on an app called "Calm" and set a timer for 4 hours. Though as a twenty-two-year-old,

I learned a few things. Vampires and monsters don't exist. The crawlspace in my closet only held discarded mouse traps and installation. The shadows moving around on the closets might not be mine, but they're still not real and can be ignored.

I acknowledge that it's strange how my childhood fears and sleep terrors would go onto my adult life, but it could explain why I still find myself unable to sleep well at night. I suffer from sleep deprivation. It's the reason that I can fall asleep in classes only to jolt awake to see my Ethics professor, Dr. Floyd, staring back at me with his stainless silver mug in his hands and a look of confusion on his face. How I can drink two cups of coffee only to find myself taking a three-hour nap after enduring only two classes. How I can eat three whole plates full of pork chops, cabbage, and white rice only to find myself devouring a bag of kettle cooked chips almost two hours later. My body is trying to process ways to regain the loss of energy and refresh itself for the day to come, and it takes a week to recover at a time. However, a college student can never seem to ever fully recover from sleep deprivation.

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