

# Haunted by old childhood fear

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As a little girl I used to be frightened of the man under the bed.

I would lie in my room tucked firmly under my mound of blankets with the night light on, the closet door shut tight, and the curtains drawn.

I imagined my blankets were armored and could shield me from any knife-carrying intruder who might break through my window or burst from my closet.

If I had to use the bathroom or get a drink of water, my feet could not touch the hardwood floor between the bed and the throw rug on the way to the door.

I might be brave enough to jump feet first from the high dive at camp, or to investigate the attic of my aunt's antique house (in broad



## The Blank Page

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daylight), but I was no fool.

The man under the bed would reach out, grab my ankles, pull me under the bed, and stab me to death if I let an uncovered leg hang down to the floor.

You never knew what might be alive and invisible on the hardwood floor, either.

Rugs, on the other hand, were

safe. They were warm and furry, and I imagined I was leaping from one island to another.

It's been years since I needed a night light, and I can sleep with my arms on top of the blankets now.

When I moved into my apartment, I thought I'd left the man under my bed behind me long ago.

There are a still a few things I'm still afraid of, though.

When I hear a low-flying plane roar by, sometimes I prepare myself for a re-enactment of Hiroshima in Boston.

When I wake up on a quiet Saturday morning, I wonder if the Apocalypse has come, and I've been left behind to burn in hell.

I'm afraid of fires, of rats, and of men breaking into my apart-

ment to steal, or to kill me.

A few nights ago the man under my bed stood up.

As in most dreams, at first everything seemed perfectly normal.

I peeled open my eyes, crawled out of my room, and headed to the bathroom for a shower.

The living room, lit only by the first rays of early morning sun, seemed strangely unfamiliar.

That didn't seem to bother me. Only a part of me noticed.

Halfway to the bathroom, I heard his muffled footsteps. The man under the bed was coming to kill me.

He tried to touch me, but I convinced him I needed a shower. Surprisingly, he let me go into the windowless bathroom.

He'd wait under the couch, he said.

I locked the bathroom door, and wondered, sweating profusely, what I should do.

Then I heard the doorbell ring. I fumbled with the lock and threw open the bathroom door, but he had already beat me to the front door.

He stepped outside, holding the door shut tight behind him.

I could hear him trying to convince my sister that I wanted him here, and because it was a dream, I knew he could muffle any cry I tried to make.

I tried to scream anyway.

"Help Me!" I strained. I couldn't make a noise.

"HELP ME!!" I croaked again.

Finally, in one loud and long shriek, I cried, "HELP MEEEEEE!!!" at the top of my lungs.

When I opened my eyes, it was dark and silent, and the early morning sun had not yet risen.

I turned on my light and saw Ed-the-cat trembling, terrified, in my doorway.

I got up, turned on the hall light, closed my closet door tight, pulled my shades all the way down, and before climbing under my armored blankets...

I checked my room for the man under the bed.

**'THE PRESIDENT NEEDS TO RELAX — HE WORKS SO HARD, CUTTING HEALTH CARE, EDUCATION, AID TO THE POOR AND FARMERS ...'**

