

Instructions for the Third Eye

Murder in the Dark

Margaret Atwood

The eye is the organ of vision, and the third eye is no exception to that. Open it and it sees, close it and it doesn't.

Most people have a third eye but they don't trust it. That wasn't really F., standing on the corner, hands in his overcoat pockets, waiting for the light to change: F. died two months ago. It's a trick my eyes played on me, they say. A trick of the light.

I've got nothing against telepathy, said Jane; but the telephone is so much more dependable.

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What's the difference between vision and a vision? The former relates to something it's assumed you've seen, the latter to something it's assumed you haven't. Language is not always dependable either.

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If you want to use the third eye you must close the other two. Then breathe evenly; then wait. This sometimes works; on the other hand, sometimes you merely go to sleep. That sometimes works also.

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When you've had enough practice you don't have to bother with these preliminary steps. You find too that what you see depends partly on what you want to look at and partly on how. As I said, the third eye is only an eye.

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There are some who resent the third eye. They would have it removed, if they could. They feel it as a parasite, squatting in the centre of their forehead, feeding on the brain. To them the third eye shows only the worst scenery: the gassed and scorched corpses at the cave-mouth, the gutted babies, the spoor left by generals, and, closer to home, the hearts gone bubonic with jealousy and greed, glinting through the vests and sweaters of anyone at all. Torment, they say and see. The third eye can be merciless, especially when wounded.

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But someone has to see these things. They exist. Try not to resist the third eye: it knows what it's doing. Leave it alone and it will show you that this truth is not the only truth. One day you will wake up and everything, the stones by the driveway, the brick houses, each brick, each leaf of each tree, your own body, will be glowing from within, lit up, so bright you can hardly look. You will reach out in any direction and you will touch the light itself.

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After that there are no more instructions because there is no more choice. You see. You see.