

The Monster

This is a true “Once Upon A Time” story.

When I was a little boy I had a monster that lived in my closet. I know all children think there are monsters in their closet. Most often these monsters stem from childhood fears, portrayed images of a dangerous world, and from colorful imaginations fueled by the news and certainly from horror movies and TV shows. But my monster was not imaginary, I had a REAL monster that lived in my closet. His skin seemed to be tough as leather and covered with scales; most often his skin and scales were green, but sometimes, depending on his mood, he would change colors. Sometimes I would open my eyes at night to see him standing over me and he would be black and blue as if he had just been in a monster brawl down at the monster hangout. Sometimes he would be red, other times still he would be sky-blue. I never knew what color he would be. Sometimes, on those particularly scary nights he would be multicolored with colors shifting and morphing from one extreme to the other. The one thing that was always constant was a trickle of blood that dribbled from his forehead. He was always hunched over, never stood erect and, fortunately for me, he could not move very fast. Another fortunate thing for me is he could not touch me unless I was awake and could see him.

Sometimes I would wake up and he would be stuck in the closet; I could hear him, scratching at the door, clawing at the round shiny doorknob. The urge to get out of bed and open the closet door was strong; I was never able to subdue that urge. When I got close to the door he would stop scratching and clawing at the door and he would get very quiet; waiting for the inevitable moment when I would open the door. I never knew why I opened the door; I only knew that I had to. I knew, when I first opened the door, I would hear first the gurgled laugh. Sometimes, he would start to laugh as I approached. When my hand on the door knob and my ear to the door I could hear his heavy breathing; hearing his breathing through the door would make me shudder and my breathing would stop. As I slowly turned the knob I could hear him re-positioning himself, getting ready to pounce on me and devourer me, maul me to a bloody mass, quivering and jerking as the tendons in my legs and arms were ripped from me; it was an inevitability. Regardless, I could not stop myself; I would always open the door.

Sometimes I could get a good look at him before he reached for me with his hairy hand, claws that were sharpened ready to tear at me. I could see the expression on his face, the rippling muscles that had ripped small children to shreds in the past. I could smell his sweat; and always that trickle of blood on his forehead. It was a horrible existence for a small child.

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As he got ready to jump at me I would race back to my bed, slam under the covers and shiver with fear. I did not dare come out from under the covers for the remainder of the night. I would hear him breathing inches from my head, just waiting for me to make a mistake and allow even the smallest part of my body to come from under the covers. Even if my smallest finger slipped out he could grab it, pull me across the floor and slam me against the wall. I'm sure he would pull my arms off and swing them over his head, laughing as I bleed to death. I recall pulling the wings off of flies and wonder if they felt pain. Would he look at me and wonder if I felt pain? Perhaps he would look deep into my eyes and ponder my thoughts as he watched me die.

As morning came, I would listen intently; waiting for any evidence that he was still there, waiting for me. Slowly I would peak and listen; but each morning he was gone. There were times that I would see spots of blood on the bedspread, obviously from the trickle of blood that dripped from his forehead. I told my parents about it but they never believed me. On those occasions when I found spots of blood I would run down stairs, get my Mom and have her come and look to prove there was a monster living in my closet. I would run back up the stairs with her slowly following. My intent was to show her the blood but by the time I had returned to my little chamber of horrors the blood would be gone. This attempt at proof would take place a number of times in the early stages of my multiple encounters and each time the blood was gone. I eventually stopped calling my Mother because I knew by the time she got there all the evidence would have been removed. I lived this horror alone.

When I was 8 years old my parents told me my Dad had received a promotion at work and we were going to move to another town. They were afraid I would be disappointed. Everyone knows children do not like to move. If you move as a child your life will be over, leave your friends, your familiar environment, such things will end the life of a child. I was overjoyed. But I had to keep it a secret. If the monster learned of my plan he would move there too. If I could keep it a secret I could be rid of this pestilence for life. I could grow up a normal boy. Sleep soundly every night. Yes, I was ecstatic about moving.

The day came. I was so sly. I told my Dad I would help him pack up the garage and the work shed. I told my Mom I would help her pack the kitchen, the dining room and the living room. Anything I could do to keep me from packing up my own room. I certainly did not want to pack the closet. Seems the monster always went away when Mom or Dad opened the closet. I knew, if I opened the closet, the monster would grab me and kill me; the best I could hope for would be he would only bite me a few times until I told him where we were moving to.

As we pulled away from the house I dared not look back but I could hear him screaming; I could not help but look back. There he was, in the window of my room. I had seen him

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mad before but the look on his face was a look I can never forget. Anger, rage, contempt, disappointment, and evil desire were mixed all together. I quickly turned, looking straight ahead and tried very hard to squeeze my ears shut. As we got farther from the house the sounds of him drifted farther and farther away until, hard as I tried, I could not hear him.

My first night in the new house was the most restful sleep I'd ever had. For the next several years I slept well, grew up normal and eventually forgot about my monster. Once in a great while, when I was still young, I would wonder whose house he was at now. Was he still in the same closet? Did the new owners of our old home have a child? Was the monster still tormenting; were there other children living the horror I had left behind? As a child I wondered about these things, but as time passed, I grew older and the vivid memories of my imagination faded away.

Twenty years passed; I had not thought of the monster for almost two decades. Most things we think as children drift away like smoke from a smoldering fire. Age convinced me the monster was not real. Children have fears and they manifest those fears into monsters. Perhaps I dreamt of monsters because of childish insecurities; for whatever reason, maturity taught me that there are no such things as monsters in a child's closet.

As a rule, everyone takes a nostalgic trip; I am no different. Check out the old places where we grew up, look at the old school; take a drive down that old lane. During one of my work related trips I drove through my old hometown. There was the old house. I laughed inside as I thought about the silly fears of a small child. I thought of the monster and laughed. All those nights I lay in my bed, so afraid to look, too afraid to sleep.

The house was empty and was in disrepair. It saddened my heart. This is the house where I spent my young years and now it was in a state of serious decay. A building permit was taped to a small handmade sign in the front yard. The building permit said the house would be totally remodeled for the new owner. I figured it would not hurt to go in and look around a bit. I wanted to see the kitchen where my Mom made me chocolate chip cookies, to stand under the stair steps where I pretended to be a secret agent, hiding and listening, gathering information to use on my next mission; to check out the back yard and reminisce about the time I spent playing games with friends. And yes, to open the closet and think of memories long gone.

I expected to see an empty space; I expected to see dust and an empty hanger or two. I did not expect to see him. The instant I opened the door there he was. The monster was real and still there... multicolored and angry; blood dripping from his forehead, drool dripping from his long teeth. I was stunned; I was frightened to the point of stupefaction and petrification. I turned to run but my slight hesitation was all the time the monster needed to reach out and grab me and push me down on the floor. For the first time I felt his fingers

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upon me; fingers that were cold, clammy and slick, like oil. How could this be! How could the monster, which I had convinced myself was all in my imagination, have me pinned to the floor. His hot breath steamed across my face with each exhale. His drool and spit splattered my face as his head shook back and forth. He tightened the grip with his strong putrid smelling hands around my neck and slowly steadied himself on his hind legs. He was leaning over me; I knew my life was going to end. This monster had waited in this closet for 20 years, hoping and probably knowing that someday I would return, knowing that someday he would have the opportunity to kill me, to rip my arms off of me like I had done to the fly. For all those days I hit him with shoes and toys he would, on this day, reap his revenge.

He turned his head toward the door, turned back to look at me. He then turned to look toward the window. His breathing slowed, his grip got tighter. He rearranged himself a bit, and I thought he was going to position himself to slam me against the wall.

His head bent down low, toward my face. Would he rip my throat out? Those long fangs would rip through my neck like a knife through soft butter. Why did I come back to this house, why did I open that door? My life was seconds from ending. I thought of all the things I had done, all the things that I wanted to do knowing there was no chance now.

He pulled his head away and with his right hand he extended his index finger. That claw looked to be the longest and sharpest. With the very tip he touched me ever so gently on the forehead and pierced my skin; I started to bleed. A burning sensation started to come over me. The monster loosened his grip on me and stood up more erect than he ever had before. I could not move; my body seemed to have gone numb, like I had been drugged. I saw him change and reshape before my very eyes. As he changed I could tell he was taking on a resemblance of a man. The man looked like me. I could feel myself changing as well. My hands, my face, my entire body was changing in a matter of seconds. The burning sensation on my forehead, which had reached a fevered pitch, was starting to subside. The numbness was going away but try as I might my movement was restricted, like slow motion. I slowly extended my arms and saw my hands were not my own. They were the hands of a monster with long claws. I touched my forehead and realized I had a trickle of blood flowing from the tiny wound he had inflicted on me. The monster, who now looked like me, picked up the keys to my car, and with a smile on his face said, "Tag, You're it." He then turned and walked out the door. I heard my car start and as he drove away I could hear him laughing.

There was nothing I could do but take my place in the closet and wait for the next child.