

The Monster

Our town has a monster. A real, hideous, horrible, ugly, repugnant, dreadful, child-eating monster. The monster looks a bit like an ordinary man, but it can't disguise itself completely because it's bent over and shuffles along. But worst of all is its face. A bloated, blotchy, red, knotted, mask of a face with a human-type face sort of peeping through.

The monster lives in an ordinary house near the park and it comes out to go through the trees down to the sports field to find children to eat. I haven't seen it eat any children or do anything bad but my friend Jasper has seen it hiding, trying to get close to children to pounce. And he's seen it eating a piece of human with blood trickling down its chin.

"How come it doesn't get caught and taken to prison for eating children?" I asked Jasper.

"It's a witch monster," said Jasper, "it could put a curse on the people catching it and just walk out through the walls, so they don't dare touch it because it will just make things worse." And Jasper pulled a face and made a sort of moaning noise to show just how bad things would be if they got worse.

But I asked Dad anyway, "How come they don't catch the monster and put it in prison?"

"What monster is that?" asked Dad.

"The horrible monster in the park," I said. Gee how many monsters are there?

Dad was busy burning his fingers on the tray he was getting out of the oven.

"Ow, ow, ow," he said, "Monsters always get their comeuppance in the end."

"But it eats people!"

"Mum will be home soon and it's our turn on dinner, so fewer monsters and more table setting."

I told Jasper that the monster had Dad in its power.

"They bewitch adults so that they can get their children," he said,

I didn't like the sound of that.

When the monster goes stalking its prey in the park, Jasper and I go stalking too. We creep along bending down and hiding behind trees and buildings and anything we can find. It pretends to be a person walking its dog. The dog looks like an ordinary terrier, but Jasper says it's a disguised dragon and the monster keeps it to devour the bones of its victims.

Last Saturday after rugby, Jasper and I went over to the monster's house to

watch as the monster came out to go stalking.

“Let's go inside and get evidence,” Jasper said.

“No way. I'm not going into a monster and dragon's lair,” I yelled.

“It's safe while it's out looking for a meal,” Jasper said, “we could rescue some of its prisoners and be heroes.”

“We'll be cursed,” I said, but Jasper was walking up to the house.

“Wait for me,” I yelped and went after him.

The monster's lair was pretty ordinary. There was a sofa and armchairs and a TV and through the kitchen door we could see a sink bench and fridge.

“It looks like a person's home,” I whispered. I was pretty pleased about that because I was scared enough already and didn't want to see cages and half eaten children'

“Monsters do that to make you think they are people, silly. The bodies are in the back rooms.”

Then a horrible sort of darkness came into the room. There was a shadow. There was a shape. The hideous horrible misshapen, monstrous, ghoulish, child-eating thing and its dragon had come back. It was standing between us and the door. And it had heard. It was too late for bluffing our way out.

We were trapped. Imprisoned in the creature's lair by our own folly. It would eat our flesh and the dragon would devour our bones. I felt warm and trickily down my legs. Jasper screamed and ran.

The monster pointed to a chair and said, “Sit.” I sat.

The monster looked into the back room. “Your rather dubious friend has executed a very fine upside down exit through a window,” it said.

I don't know what dubious means, but I think he was being rude about Jasper. I didn't like him saying executed. That means chopping off your head. At least it hadn't got any angrier that most of its lunch had run away.

The monster sat down in front of me. Close up it was even more horrible with it knotty lumps where its face should be, but it was less scary and more human-like as well. I wondered if monsters have a nice side even when they find their lunch poking around in their lair without permission.

“I'm not going to tell you you're trespassing because you know that,” the monster said, “but I think I should clear up what I am.”

“Do you know why I look like this?” it asked. I began to breath again. Or at least I think I might have stopped and it seemed like a good idea to be breathing. This didn't seem to be a monster pre-lunch discussion. More like a

dad type of “now you've been bad again, haven't you?” lecture. So there I sat trying not to look like monster lunch, and hoping for the best.

“Jasper says you are a monster,” I mumbled. Perhaps monsters don't like being called monsters even though they are. So since Jasper had escaped I thought it was quite clever to say that it was his idea. “But I think you are human,” I added. The monster was trying to pretend it was a man and might be quite pleased I said that.

“I think you should listen to yourself more and less to Jasper,” it said. “I look like this because some time ago I saw a car accident. It wasn't a big accident but one of the drivers was hurt and couldn't get out. I opened the door and smelt petrol so I lifted the person clear and got in the car to make sure there was no one left hurt inside. Cars don't usually catch fire after an accident but I was very unlucky and this one did. Do you know what happens to skin when it gets burned?”

“Ummm, that?” I asked, pointing to the knotty red stuff that was where his face should be.

“You got it boy,” and he laughed in a rather monsterish way because his mouth is a bit of a funny shape. “Actually when I was a young man I was rather handsome,” he said. “The Queen came to visit, just so she could stare.”

“Really?” I asked.

“No, not really,” he said. “I was pretty ordinary even then,” and he laughed rather a lot at his own joke. He put out a hand. “We haven't been formally introduced. I'm Harry Wright.”

“I'm Terry,” I said.

The dragon wagged its tail and woofed.

“I'd like you to stay for a talk and a lemon drink, but I expect your folks don't want you talking to strangers, so we'll say no more about you coming in here without being invited as long as you will listen to four things I say.”

“Yes sure Harry.” I was feeling like a monster tamer and was getting pretty perky.

“Don't play with fire,” and Harry pointed to his face and chuckled.

“Don't judge a book by its cover.”

I couldn't see what that had to do with anything but I nodded anyway.

“Don't listen to Jasper so much.”

“I sure won't be doing that again,” I said firmly.

“And ask you parents if you can come visiting for lemon drinks and cake. He added “And bring Jasper, he needs to see the monster close up.”

I felt pretty yuk about that. Harry had heard Jasper saying that the back room was where the monster kept the children it wanted to eat. Boy is that embarrassing. But Harry went on talking not really to me. "It gets a bit lonely at times. Not every one wants a visit from someone who looks like me." I felt pretty yuk about that too.

On the way home there was no sign of Jasper.

"Mum. The man by the park with all the scars has kids in for lemon drink and cakes. Is it OK if I go?"

I didn't think Mum would want to know how I met him.

"Harry Wright? Yes that's fine, Terry. He's a hero you know. He saved a person's life in an accident and got all those terrible burns all over his body. He can't even stand up straight now. I'm very proud of you for not being afraid of him. Some people are."

"Oh Mum, what do you think I am? He looks fine to me."

I think I overdid the cool. Mum looked at me kind of funny.

I went over to Jasper's house.

He said, "Hey Terry, how did you escape?"

"I told the monster you were hiding under the bed and while he was looking I ran out the front door."

"Wicked."

"Jasper, there's a friend of my Mum's who has kids over for lemon drink and cake. Want to come next Saturday?"

"Yeah, why not? But it will be pretty tame after the monster."

"Whatever you say, Jasper."