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$16.95 US/CAN

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Tonight, when I looked under the bed for my monster, I found this note instead.

What was I going to do? I needed a monster under my bed. How was I supposed to get to sleep if my monster was gone?
I tried to sleep, but it wasn't the same without Gabe.

I missed his ragged breathing.

His nose-whistling.

The scrabbling of his uncut claws.

How would I ever get to sleep without Gabe's familiar scary noises and his spooky green ooze?

It was no use. Gabe would be gone for a week and I just had to have a monster.

I climbed quietly out of bed so my parents wouldn't hear me. (Grown-ups have some strange ideas about monsters under beds.) I knocked on the floorboards, then scrambled back under my covers. I waited nervously.

Would a new monster appear?

What would he be like?

Would his snorting be as cheerful as Gabe's?
When I heard some creaking under my bed, I knew that the substitute monster had arrived.

“Good evening,” said a low, breathy voice. “My name is Herbert and I will be your monster for the evening.”

“Herbert? What kind of name is that for a monster?! You don’t sound scary at all. Have you ever scared a kid before?”

“Well, no, but I have read all the best books on the topic.”

“Do you have long teeth and scratchy claws?” I asked.

“No, but I have an overbite. And I’m a mouth breather. Listen.

Hih-huh, hih-huh, hih-huh, hih-huh… Herbert’s panting was kind of scary, but it wasn’t enough for me.
“Listen, Herbert, I’m sorry. I just don’t think this is going to work. It’s nothing personal, but I really need a monster with claws.”

“Picky, picky,” Herbert complained. “As you wish. I’ll go.”

There was some more creaking. Then Herbert was gone.
Some scratching warned me that a second monster had appeared.

“Good evening,” he said in a high, silky voice. “My name is Ralph. I understand you need a monster with claws. If you would please lean over, I will hold out an arm for inspection.”
Instead, I was surprised to see sleekly brushed fur with smooth, shiny claws. “Excuse me, I don’t mean to be rude,” I asked, “but is that nail polish on your claws?”

“Yes, it is,” Ralph replied. “I believe professional monsters should always be well-groomed.”

I could tell that this was not going to work either. “I’m sorry to disappoint you, Ralph, but I need a monster with scary claws.” Like Gabe’s, I thought.

I heard some more scratching and I knew Ralph was gone.
A minute later, a third voice from under the bed rasped, “Check out these claws, kid.”

I gathered my courage and peered over the edge.

The claws were impressive—jagged and dark and razor-sharp. So far, so good. I was a little nervous.

“Could you stick out your tail?” I whispered.

“Sure. But don’t get scared!”
I peeked through my fingers at the slimy tail slithering over the foot of my bed. That’s when I noticed the bow.

“Are you a girl monster??”

“Of course I am,” she snapped. “I’m Cynthia. Do you have a problem with that?”

“Um, yeah, I do,” I admitted. “I definitely need a boy monster. Boy monsters are for boys and girl monsters are for girls. Everybody knows that.”

“Well, aren’t you a picky one,” she sniffed, and then she was gone.
Was I being too picky? NO.

I knew that my monster needed to be well-clawed and menacing.

The whole point of having a monster, after all, was to keep me in bed, imagining all the scary stuff that could happen if I got out.
Then I heard a shuffling noise. And some slobbering.
A fourth monster was under my bed.
“Hey. The name’s Mack.”
One look at his claws proved that Mack was a big, scruffy BOY monster. I shivered. Maybe this one would work out.

“Those are excellent claws, but do you have a long tail?” I leaned over to see.

“No. my tail is stumpy,” Mack slurped. “But I do have an umu-um-usual lo-o-oong... tongue!”

“Why would I be afraid of a long tongue?” I asked.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he said, trying to sound terrifying.

“You never know when I-I-mi-i-ight... lick you!”
"Well, if you’re not even going to try-y-y to work with me..." Mack whined.

I held in my giggles.

"I re-e-e-eally don’t think you should send me away,” he warned. “Kids who reject five monsters in one night...."

"I did NOT reject five monsters tonight!” I interrupted. “My regular monster went fishing.”

"Fishing, eh? Maybe he just left because you’re SO-O-O picky. Fine. I’m out of here. But I wouldn’t expect another monster tonight if I were you.”

How was I ever going to get to sleep without my monster?
I was surprised to hear more creaking under the bed. Loud creaking. With scratching.

“I-I thought no more monsters were going to appear tonight,” I said.

“Sorry I’m late, kid.” Whew. It was Gabe.

“I thought I would enjoy fishing, but I didn’t,” he explained. “Those fish scare too easily. No challenge at all. You, however, are challenging, my friend. You’re almost too old to be afraid of monsters. You keep me on my toes. Ah, toes... a delicious snack.”

The bed quivered as Gabe’s stomach rumbled with hunger.

“Now, if you don’t mind, I’d like to start the evening with an ominous puddle of drool.”

I peeked over the edge of the bed. Green ooze spread soundlessly from underneath.
Then the bed trembled as Gabe unfurled his spiked tail. He was daring me to guess where he might pop up.

I shivered.
“So, you had some substitute monsters tonight,” Gabe said, sharpening his claws on my bedpost. “Were you... scared?”

Then Gabe started tapping. I could tell he wanted to know if I still needed him.

“No other monster can scare me like you!” I giggled, diving under my covers and pulling them up tight.

Through the blanket I heard Gabe’s soft, comforting snorts. “Ha! I know it! We’re made for each other,” he growled.
When my blanket started to slip off the bed I knew Gabe was ready to eat. “Now, if you could please stick out your foot,” he said, “I’d like to nibble your pinkie.”

I yanked my blanket back up and scrunched my feet in so Gabe couldn’t get them.

“No toes tonight, but you can have this,” I offered, pushing a pillow off the bed.

I didn’t even hear it hit the floor.
Gabe was back.
The ooze was perfect.
Everything was back to normal.

I shivered again.
I’d be asleep in no time.
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