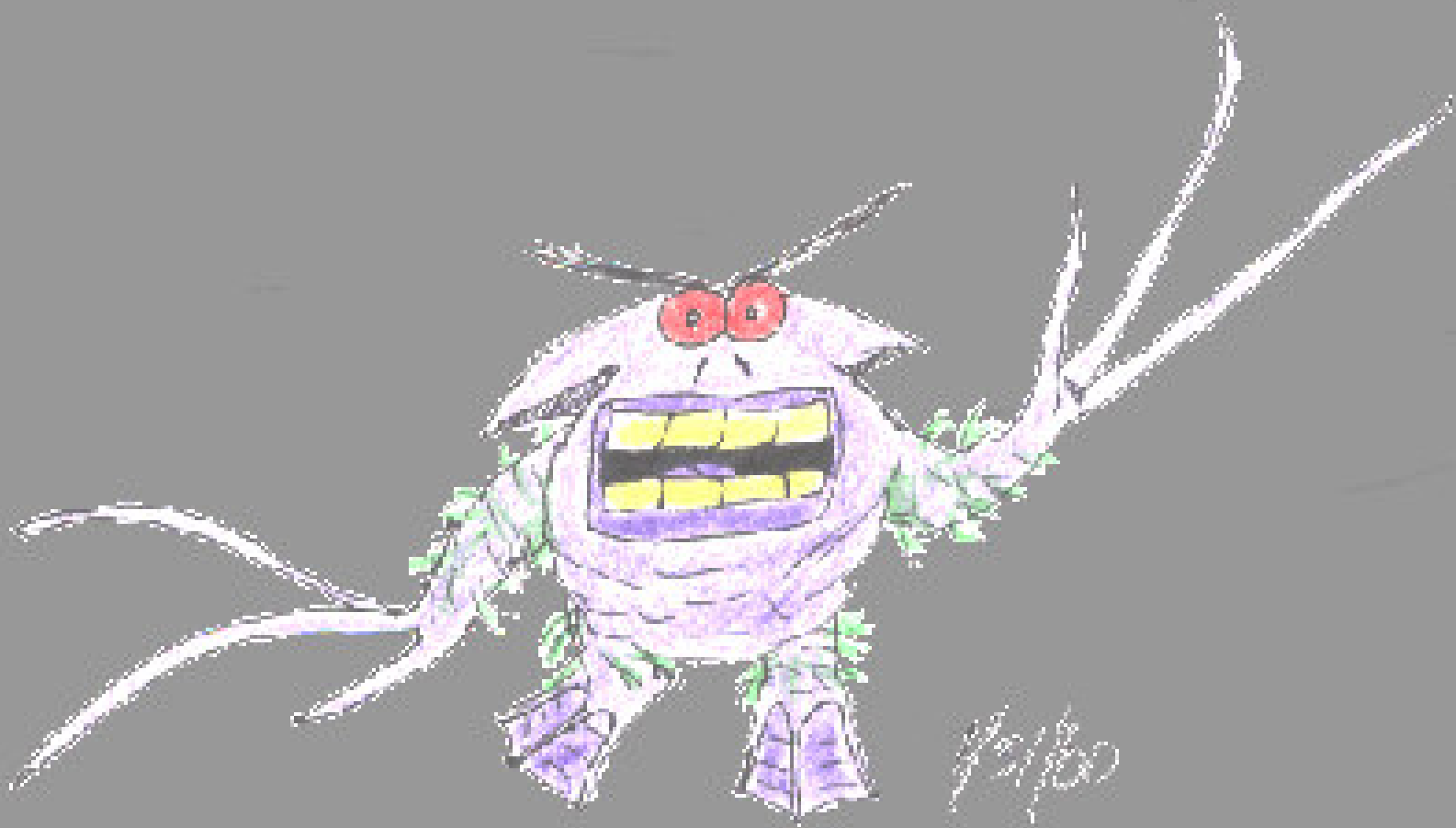


Night Light



Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

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“Read it again, Mommy. Please?” Luke begged.

“No, Luke. I’ve already read it to you twice tonight.” Ali smiled at her six-year-old son. “The suspense is just gone at this point, isn’t it? You already know the whole story by heart.”

“Yes, but I like it. Please, Mommy! Just once more!”

“Tomorrow, son. Now go to sleep. Dream. Dream about *Where the Wild Things Are*, and I won’t *have* to read it to you again.” She kissed him on the forehead, led him through his bedtime prayers, then she stood to leave.

“Mommy!”

“Yes, dear?” She turned to face him.

The child pointed to the wall. “Don’t forget to turn on my night light.”

She sighed. “Oops!” She walked over to the other side of his bed, and flipped the switch on the little, plastic Jesus that was perpetually plugged into the wall. “There you go. Now get some sleep. I love you.” She mussed his brown hair and kissed him once more. Then she turned off the ceiling light and closed the bedroom door.”

The soft, yellow and blue glow of the night light gently caressed the darkness of the room, making it not quite so harsh. Especially right by Luke’s bed. Luke closed his eyes, and he tried his best to fall asleep, thinking about his favorite book. Then his closet door slowly began to creak.

Luke’s eyes opened wide, and he sat up with a start. The door continued to creak, and he could see that it was slowly opening. Someone was in there! His heart was thudding in his chest! “Mommy!” He heard a deep, quiet laughter coming from the pitch darkness of the closet. “Mommy!!!”

He heard the footsteps of his father in the hall. His bedroom door flew open. “Luke, what’s wrong?” His father was very concerned.

Luke pointed, “There’s something in my closet, Daddy! Something opened the door!”

His father shook his head, “Luke, your mommy probably just forgot to close it before she left.” He smiled reassuringly, “Now get some sleep.” He started to close the door.

“Daddy...”

“Yes, Luke?”

“There was somebody laughing in there.”

Luke’s father rolled his eyes and let out a long, irritated sigh. “Luke, we’ve been through this before.” He walked into the boy’s room and turned on the closet light. “Look,” he opened the door all the way for his son to see, and he waved around inside with his arm, “No one is in the closet. No one was laughing.”

“But,” Luke was on the verge of tears. He knew he hadn’t imagined it. He never did. Why wouldn’t anyone believe him?

“But what, Son? Do you see anybody in the closet?”

Luke gave up, as he always had to do in the face of his father’s unyielding logic. He shook his head slowly, trying not to cry. He knew that his father would yell at him if he started crying again. “No.”

“And? If there is nobody in the closet?”

Luke looked down at his covers, not wanting to meet his father’s triumphant glare, “Then n obody could have been laughing in there.”

“That’s right.”

Luke looked up with his one last attempt at sleeping peacefully, “Can you leave the closet light on, Daddy?”

“Nope. That’s too much light. You’ll never get to sleep.” He flicked off the light, and he shut the closet door tight. “Now go to sleep. Remember, if you hear anything in the closet, it’s just your imagination playing tricks on you. You’ve got your night light on. You don’t have any excuses for being scared tonight. Mommy and Daddy need to get some sleep too, so don’t call us again for made up things.”

“But, D...”

“Or,” he added sternly, “I’ll beat your butt to drive the point home. Now go to sleep, tiger. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“What’s wrong?” Ali came into the doorway in her nightgown.

“He’s just hearing noises again. He thought the closet door opened itself.”

“Was it opened?”

He looked perplexed, “Well, yeah. I told him you probably just forgot to shut it.”

“No, I shut it.” She looked a little worried, but she blew it off quickly, and she peeked in, “Luke, honey, it’s just the air conditioner. Sometimes if the door isn’t closed tight enough it can blow open.”

“But I heard laughing.”

“Luke.” His father warned him menacingly.

Ali laughed, “I told you, just the air conditioner. Sometimes they make funny sounds, and it can sound like other things, but it’s not. Just go to sleep now.” She reached over and closed the door. Darkness surrounded little Luke, save for the gentle glow of his night light. And the doorknob on the closet began to jiggle. *Just the air conditioner*, he told himself. And he very forcefully closed his eyes, lay down, and tried to go to sleep.

In the hallway, John spoke to his wife, “If this keeps up, we’re gonna have to do something.”

“Why? It’s just a normal kid thing, John.”

John shook his head, “This is the third time this week, and Halloween’s coming up this month. You read him that book again, didn’t you?”

“Yes, he likes it. I don’t think it scares him.”

“Then why is he acting like this? Look, if he can’t handle *Where the Wild Things Are*, then he’s gonna be an absolute basket case on Halloween night.”

“Well, there’s nothing we can do about it right now, John. I’ve got too much else on my mind.”

John looked surprised, “Like what?”

Ali smiled as she sighed, and she started walking towards their room, “Work is really stressful right now, your mother-in-law’s been pestering me to come visit more often, which I don’t want to do, I haven’t heard from Amy Bolton since her husband left her for that prostitute in June...I don’t know. It all adds up. I don’t *need* to deal with a kid who has waking nightmares right now.” She turned in the bedroom doorway, “He’ll be fine.”

“I guess you’re right.” *It probably really was just the air conditioner anyway.* He paused. “I didn’t know Josh left Amy for a prostitute. Are you serious?”

“Yes, Dear, I told you that.”

“No you didn’t. You told me he left her, but not for a prostitute. I would have remembered that.”

She laughed as he joined her in the doorway, “Whatever, John.”

He kissed her, and, for a time, they both forgot the troubles of their son.

In the darkness, Luke heard what sounded like the closet door slowly creaking. *Just my imagination. It’s really just the air conditioner.* He kept his eyes shut tightly.

There was that sound, like deep, rolling laughter again. Then something new happened, “Luke.”

Oh, no! Luke knew better than to believe that the air conditioner had just said his name in a very, very deep voice. He was scared. *God, please make it go away. Even if it is just the air conditioner playing tricks on me.*

“Open your eyes, Luke. I need to talk to you about something,” said the very deep voice.

This had gone far enough. Luke knew that he was not imagining things. He opened his eyes and sat up quickly, “Who’s there?” His eyes went wide with confusion at what he saw lurking in the shadows before the closet door.

“Why are you looking at me like that, Luke? Do you find me ugly?”

“Who are you?” Luke asked in terror.

The thing with the deep voice was like a great blob of fat, purple and lumpy. Its pointed ears were aimed down, just below its excessively long eyebrows that went beyond the space of the creature’s head, like a cartoon character. It had stumpy, hairy legs and meaty arms, also covered in hair—green hair. It had two nostrils, but no nose, just two cavities where a nose should have been, had the creature been even remotely human. Its feet were webbed like a duck’s, its four fingers were all longer than its arms, its two thumbs were exactly the length of its arms, and its eyes were blood red—no whites whatsoever—just red, with little black dots, one in each eye. “My name is Ooga Booga. I’m a closet monster.”

Luke didn’t care that the thing seemed cordial. He still just wanted it to go away. He thought perhaps that if he quickly dealt with whatever this Ooga Booga wanted to discuss with him, that it would leave sooner than if not. He spoke with a frightened quiver, “What is it that you need to talk to me about?”

The thing seemed relieved not to have been ignored, “Well, Luke. It’s the night light.” At this point Luke took notice of the fact that the monster never did look directly into the light, and it kept to the shadows, never slipping into the warm glow of the little, plastic Christ. “You see, I’m allergic. It makes me terribly uncomfortable. It keeps me from doing the things I need to do.” The monster shrugged, “I was hoping maybe you would turn it off.”

Luke was suspicious. This was a *monster* after all. “Well...I can’t sleep without it. What sort of things do you need to do...exactly?”

Ooga seemed amazed that the child didn’t know a closet monster’s business, and his tone made it clear, “Why...I need to eat you of course. It’s what I do. I eat children in the dark. So let’s get on with it. You turn the light out, I come eat you, and you die. Then I shall move on to the next child.”

Luke was horrified. He started to cry silently. “No,” he at last blurted out. “Please go away! I don’t want to be dead. Ever.”

“But of course you do, Luke! It’s no secret to me that all children secretly want to die. I’ve been eating children in the shadows for more than a hundred years. Sometimes I eat them right out of their cribs, but that’s not quite so much fun. I much prefer it this way, you see. A challenge.”

“But *I* don’t want to die.” Luke insisted weakly.

Ooga feigned shock, “Why not, child! Don’t you want to experience it? To know what it’s like?”

“No. I would miss my mommy and my daddy. I’d miss all my friends.” He sniffled. “I want to stay here! Please go away now. I’m keeping the light on *all night long*.”

Ooga Booga looked sadly dejected. He slumped and shrugged, all the folds of his fat rolling downwards to punctuate his emotions. “I see. You’ll come around, Luke.” He looked up, “Is it fear, Luke? More than loss? Are you frightened of being buried in a coffin six feet under the earth? Are you frightened of decaying, becoming food for the worms?”

Luke nodded his head, hoping it would end the creature’s persistence.

Ooga smiled horribly, showing long, flat, perfectly yellow teeth, “Then you’ve nothing to fear! For when I eat you, you’ll just be gone! Nothing to bury, nothing to burn. I will bite you in half, and I

will swallow your soul. Are you sure you don't want to try it tonight?"

Luke simply sobbed, and he nodded his head.

"Very well then, perhaps I shall eat you tomorrow night. Do not doubt it, sooner or later, I will eat you, Luke. I think that you'll be happier that way. Good night." Ooga Booga waddled squishily back into the closet, and he closed the door behind him.

Luke dared not shut his eyes again all night. He dared not even blink. He dared not look away from the shadowy closet door.

Luke looked sick when Ali met him outside after school the next day. Ali knelt down and took his little hands in her own, "What's wrong, Luke? You don't look so good." She instinctively put a hand to the child's forehead.

"Nothin', Mom. I'm just sleepy. I want to take a nap..." he hesitated, "on the couch."

Ali giggled at that, "You can take a nap, but you'll have to do it in your own bed, and not for more than half an hour, or you'll be up all night. I'll make you some hot chocolate too. Does that sound good?"

Luke nodded his head groggily.

"Mrs. Anderson?" It was the voice of Luke's stuffy old Kindergarten teacher. Ali had never liked the woman. Not at all.

She looked up to see the gray-haired old woman glaring at her, "Yes, Mrs. Crow?"

"I'd like to speak with you for a moment in private. It concerns your child." She spoke coldly.

Ali rose nervously, "Yes, of course." She looked to Luke, "Stay right there, Luke. I'll be right back."

She and the old teacher walked several feet away, so that Luke could not hear them but was still in sight. "Mrs. Anderson, when children get to be Luke's age, it is a parent's responsibility to have them put to bed by a decent hour, so that they can function and participate in school."

Ali was taken aback, "But...Mrs. Crow, I put him to bed by nine-thirty every night. He's asleep by ten, and up by six. He gets eight hours of sleep every night. He gets more sleep than I do."

Mrs. Crow nodded her head and rolled her eyes, “Mrs. Anderson, it is clear to me that Luke is most certainly *not* getting enough sleep at night.”

Ali was angry, but she bit her tongue for Luke’s sake. She hated Mrs. Crow. The nerve of the old bat to accuse her of being a bad mother! How long was it going to take for Mrs. Crow to die, anyway? The woman had to be a good nine-hundred years old. “Well,” Ali said with forced sweetness, “I can assure you that he is.”

“The boy fell asleep in class three times today. I had to go clap my hands by his ears to keep him awake countless times more than that. And this is not the first time this has happened. I tell you, he was in need of a paddling, but times are different. Ten years ago, I would have tanned his hide for such rude behavior. I don’t know why parents are so particular these days about who spansks their children.” Mrs. Crow smiled wickedly, with a fond recollection, “My paddle used to be a legend in the halls of this school.” She giggled like a girl, “The children used to call it Widowmaker. I had drilled three holes in it, and placed two screws strategically to induce pain and fear. In those days, Mrs. Anderson, no child would have dared to fall asleep in *my* class.”

Ali said nothing, she was too angry to speak. She wanted to strangle this woman. She wanted to snap the woman’s veiny, wrinkled neck. Instead, she just met her belittling stare.

“I did an experiment today, Mrs. Anderson. I passed out crayons and manila paper. A frivolous thing to do, now that the budget is so specific. I can’t even get a new stapler without going out and paying for it myself!” She paused to remember her point. “But I stray from the point. The point is, I told the children to draw themselves in their rooms at home. None were so revealing as what your son drew.”

Ali had no idea what this woman could possibly be implying, “What did he draw?” She asked, with the first notable hint of impatience creeping into her voice. At that moment, Ali noticed that Mrs. Crow had been holding a rolled up piece of manila paper in her withered claw of a hand.

The old woman lifted the paper and unrolled it for the young mother to see. “He drew this, Mrs. Anderson.”

Ali wanted to laugh out loud. The picture her son had drawn was such a hilarious thing. She was proud that her son had such a

wonderful imagination. She shook her head with a smile, “What’s so bad about that?” She asked with growing insolence.

Mrs. Crow looked at Ali as though she were regarding an utter buffoon. “It’s a monster, Mrs. Anderson. A monster coming out of his closet. And there,” she pointed to the bed, “is your son, sitting up in fear...not sleeping.”

“No,” Ali shook her head, “you see, I read to him every night before he goes to bed. His favorite is *Where the Wild Things Are*. He’s just drawing...a wild thing. That’s all. He’s drawing something from his favorite bedtime story.

“Mrs. Anderson, you would be surprised at the things which frighten children. Motherhood bares with it the responsibility of anticipating these things. This book is frightening Luke. I suggest you read him something else.” She handed the paper to Luke’s mother. “I expect Luke to be well rested the next time I see him in class. I would hate to have to report this to someone. Good day, Mrs. Anderson.” Mrs. Crow turned and reentered the school building.

Ali was silently in a rage, she wanted to scream out every obscenity she knew, but she turned and saw her son waiting patiently. So sleepy. She would hold her tongue until Luke couldn’t hear. She couldn’t wait for the day to end, so that she could tell John just how much she hated Mrs. Crow and why! And she could say it in exactly the words she wanted to. After Luke was in bed...*and sleeping*.

She walked over to Luke, pitying the lad for having to put up with that old crone every week day. She held out her hand, and he took it, “Ready to go home, drink hot chocolate, and take a nap...on the couch?”

Luke nodded his head—too tired for words.

Ali released a melodramatic sigh of relief, “I can’t do this every night. I won’t. It’s just too inconvenient.”

John kissed her on the forehead as she slowly closed Luke’s bedroom door. “Those lullabies almost put me to sleep. How’d they do on him?”

“He’s out like a drunk. I thought he’d never stop whimpering.”

“What was he whimpering for?”

“Well, I hate to think that his evil bitch of a teacher was right, but there has to be some explanation for his behavior in class. I didn’t read him his favorite tonight.”

John looked amused, “Really? What did you read him instead?”

“*Good Night Moon.*”

“Well, there’s a contrast for you.” He chuckled quietly.

“I just hope this does the trick. I don’t have the patience for this.”

John shook his head, “Neither do I. I won’t be the father of a coward. I’m concerned about the night light. I think he might be getting up and playing after we leave him. Besides, even if he’s not, it’s not good to encourage his fear of the dark. He’s got to get over it sometime.”

“I know, John, but let’s worry about that later. I’ve got to get some sleep.” She took his hand, and he easily allowed himself to be led down the hall to their own room.

“Luuuuuuke!”

The boy was jolted from sleep. He sat up, his heart beating fiercely in his chest, and looked to the side of his bed. Relief flooded his whole being when he saw Jesus glowing warmly, keeping all closet monsters at bay for another night. Fear stabbed him like a needle again, however, when he noticed the shadowy, purple figure cowering in the shadows beside his closet door.

“Luke, I want to play with you! Please turn out the light, just for tonight.”

“But...” Luke protested, “if I turn out the light, you’ll eat me.”

Ooga shrugged, “Well, yes. But it would only take tonight.” He grinned repulsively, and his left eye slowly rolled right out of its socket, hanging by veins. Luke started to cry, holding blankets to his face, but never looking away from the terrible monstrosity before him. “Oh!” Ooga made an embarrassed gesture as he pushed his massive eyeball back into place, “Excuse me. That happens sometimes when I’m feeling punchy.” The closet monster then extended his fat, purple tongue and licked all over his own face.

“Go away.” Luke managed to say between terrified sobs, “I’m keeping my light on.”

Ooga frowned at this, "I'm going to eat you, Luke. I've never been turned away from a tasty, little meal like you. Never. You'll enjoy it, I think. Death. You will melt in my mouth like candy. It will be so delicious for us both. Mmm. Yes." Ooga Booga smacked his fat and hungry lips. "I want to snap you in two with my teeth, Luke. I love little boys like you."

Luke could not contain his tears, but he was too afraid to make much sound. He just wanted the monster to go away. He prayed as hard as he knew how.

Ooga looked to the night light, then quickly turned away and looked to the child cowering in bed. "Your parents," the monster ventured, "are interesting people. Your mother is very pleased with herself. Very interested in herself. Why, you're lucky she bothered to sing you to sleep even this once. The word 'inconvenience' should never make decisions for mothers. They lose children that way." He chuckled. "Why do you suppose she tells herself that I am nothing but the air conditioner. She's awake right now, you know. She's writhing in pleasure beneath your father and licking the sweat from his neck. And do you know, Luke? She doesn't even love him at all. He's just a convenient thing to have. She's not impressed with his personality, in fact, they have nothing in common. Nothing at all, except for what they're doing right now. That and you, of course. They won't stay together after I eat you." He nodded. "Mmm. I'm quite certain of that. When you disappear, leaving behind you a room painted in your own blood, they'll quickly lose each other in their despair. She won't allow him to grieve, because his job is not to mourn at all, but to comfort her instead and tend her pain instead of his own. He will finally say, 'enough.' You'll be doing them a favor, boy.

"But I miss my point. My point on your mother is this. She hears you now, as only mothers can. She hears your frightened breathing, she knows that you are awake and in terror, she knows, but she does not care. She pretends to think it isn't you...only the air conditioner, like me. It doesn't comply with her own desires to come to you now. Your cries go ignored. I have to change that.

"You see, Luke. Your father is the one who will help me to have you. And your mother is the one who will keep him from taking you back. I have it all planned out. Your father believes that your night light is a problem. He thinks you stay up and play. And so I shall prove him right, my sweet morsel. I shall play with you tonight,

and we shall laugh the night away! And when your father comes in to grant me sweet darkness, I'll first eat your legs, then I'll swallow your screams. Oh," Ooga closed his eyes and shuddered pleasurably with the thought, "those inebriating screams."

Luke was speechless, his mind locked in prayer, just as his eyes—wet and red with tears—remained locked on this monster Ooga Booga.

"So how shall we play? I know! I shall amuse you with my funny side. My deft wit! My amazing feats! You will laugh at me, Luke. You will laugh until you stop!"

Suddenly, a unicycle appeared beneath the creature and he was sitting atop. A pink tutu materialized at his waist, and he began to sing, "Have you seen the ghost of John?" Ooga giggled with delight. The shapes of human skulls began to push their way through the purple fat of Ooga's gut, moving their jaws and hissing hellishly from behind the monster's flesh. "Ouch," Ooga screamed, "There's something in my ear!" He waited, with a long finger in his ear, but Luke said nothing in response. The boy just stared. "Now you're supposed to say, 'then take your finger out,' and I..." Ooga flicked his finger out of his ear and sent a severed human thumb flying across the room to splat on the wall by Luke's bed and fall horribly to the floor, "...do!" Ooga laughed heartily at this, but then stopped. The child was not amused.

"I see," said the monster. "Slapstick is not your thing. Well, how about stand up!" Within the instant he'd finished speaking, a painted mustache and a pair of glasses with dark eyebrows were decorating Ooga's face. The skulls were gone, but the tutu and the unicycle remained. He snapped his fingers and a cigar appeared between two of them. "Well, let me tell you about my trip to Hell, Luke. Hell. Hell is the devil's country, and he can have it. I once ate the soul of a child there in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas, I don't know. He was a juicy one too! So juicy, in fact, I got blood all over my Chin! Chin, the half-wit Chinese boy I keep in my pocket. Well, maybe not half-wit, but definitely half!" Ooga began to pull something out of his pocket.

"No!" Luke screamed. Then he only whimpered it again, "No."

Ooga looked sad. His body slumped and his magic accouterments disappeared. He plopped to the floor where the

unicycle had been wobbling the instant before. “I see. Children never get my humor.” He turned to go back to the closet. “Playing, I guess, is out of the question for this pairing. You and me. Mouth and meal. But that was a lovely scream, Luke. He smiled wickedly, as he began to waddle away. “Lovely indeed. Tomorrow, child. Tomorrow you’ll be served to me on a silver platter.”

Ooga vanished into the closet’s darkest shadows, and once again, Luke remained alert all night. Looking to the closet, looking to the night light, waiting for the saving grace of dawn.

The following night was a miserable one for Luke. His mother had kept him home from school. More because she didn’t want to hear anything from Mrs. Crow than that she actually thought Luke needed a break. Luke had watched her drive away, and then he had waited for her to get home all day. He had waited on the front porch, facing the house, so that nothing could sneak up on him from the front door. Luke hadn’t wanted to stay home. He would rather have been subjected to the cold discipline of Mrs. Crow.

When his mother did get home, Luke told her everything, and she had forbidden him to watch *Scooby-Doo* ever again. Luke had wished all day for his mother’s compassion, and instead he had triggered her fiercest irritation. Luke was more deeply saddened than he could ever recall having been, as he lay in bed, waiting for his father to leave him. All he could think about as his father droned on was that his favorite book was gone forever. His favorite book ever. Now the victim of his mother’s irritation. She had tossed it in the garbage right before his weeping eyes.

Luke missed the monsters from his book. He missed the notion that he could be like Max, the hero of the story. He missed the dreams he had of going to that place, where all the monsters ran wild, and becoming a king. He wished that it were that simple. He wished that he could put on a wolf suit and prove to Ooga Booga that he was the fiercest beast of all, and Ooga would cower to him and call him King Luke. And Ooga would never frighten any children ever again.

Suddenly Luke’s father said something worth listening to.

“And about that damned night light...”

Luke sat to attention, tense and distressed.

Luke’s father noticed this and scowled. “I don’t think a boy your age should need a light to keep him comfort, Son. However,

your mother doesn't want me to bother you about it just yet. But I'm telling you, Luke, you're gonna have to get used to sleeping in the dark like a man very soon. And if I think for one minute that you're up playing at night, when you're supposed to be asleep, I'm going to yank that thing out of the wall for good. Do I make myself clear?"

Luke nodded his head, pale as could be.

"All right then, sport." John mussed the boy's hair, "Get some sleep. And I mean it. There is *nothing* in the closet. And if there ever were, it would have to get through me before it could touch you. You hear me? Just call me as loud as you can if anybody is ever trying to hurt you, and I'll come running." Luke's father stood up, walked over to close the closet door good and tight, and left Luke to his sleeping.

Luke began to pray the instant his bedroom door was shut.

Half an hour passed, and Luke was wide awake still, afraid to move, afraid to remind the monster that he was there, when suddenly the closet began its slow creaking, and a low laughter filled the shadows all around. "I'm tired of this game, Luke. You haven't been any fun at all. I can't make you laugh, but I can make you..."

Silence. Had the monster gone away? Luke had to know. He couldn't sleep anyway. He sat up slowly and peeked into the shadows. Ooga sat there as always, and he smiled when he met Luke's gaze, "SCREAM!!!!!" Ooga Booga's eyes shot out of their sockets and wiggled around in the air at the ends of long tendons, blood poured from his mouth along with the half digested body parts of several other children. Ooga reached down and picked up a handful of something Luke couldn't identify in the shadows, and he flung it all at Luke.

Luke screamed. Luke screamed at the top of his lungs.

It seemed an instant thing, that his father bolted through the doorway. Luke wanted to cry, as he pointed with relief at the spot where Ooga Booga was. Then he looked at his father's furious face, and his heart sank. He turned back to the spot where the monster had been, only to find that no trace remained. Ooga Booga was gone. But why was his father so enraged? What had become of whatever the monster had thrown at him?

Luke followed his father's angry eyes. He looked at his bed, covered with his favorite toys. His action figures. Laying just where Ooga Booga had tossed them. "Dad...please..."

Luke never finished what he had wanted to say. His father snatched the covers away, sending the action figures flying onto the floor. He then snatched the boy up and spanked him brutally. Luke was sobbing when his father threw him back to the bed and stood to leave. "Never lie to me again. You need to grow up. No more night light."

"No! Please, Daddy! PLEASE!!!"

"Don't talk back to me!" His father shouted harshly. "I am very disappointed in you. You aren't a baby, Luke! Tonight you're gonna sleep in the dark just like everybody else." He went over and yanked the night light out of the wall. "Never again, Luke. Don't even ask for it. This piece of shit is going in the garbage with that damned book of yours."

Luke's father slammed the closet door shut and stormed out of the boy's bedroom, slamming that door shut as well. Luke could only sob.

When his eyes at last adjusted to the dark, Luke looked over to the closet door. It remained closed. He looked over to the bedroom door, then back to the closet. He considered an escape.

"I'm not in the closet, Luke. I'm under the bed. Don't go anywhere."

Luke sat frozen. He was too frightened even to pray. An hour passed, and nothing happened. Luke's father started to snore.

"Are you ready, Luke?"

"Go away. I hate you." Luke's tears had run dry.

"Such silly things you say, my chewy tidbit." The monster popped up right beside Luke's bed and smiled hellishly.

"MOMMY!!!!" A rubbery hand covered Luke's mouth, and he could scream no more.

"Why did I choose you, Luke? Don't you wonder that?" Luke was hardly listening as he squirmed frantically. Ooga grabbed his torso with his other hand and began to lift him out of his bed. "Some mommys are deaf to the cries of inconvenience, Luke. Their children generally make the loveliest meals. Yes. Mmm."

Luke squirmed and squealed as Ooga Booga lifted him up, over his monstrous head and then lowered him slowly into his mouth. When Luke was about half way down, he felt Ooga's cold, yellow teeth on his skin. There was a pressure, and a crunch, as the monster bit Luke in half. Everything suddenly looked so much brighter, and

there was strangely no pain, no feeling at all. Luke caught a glance at all the blood on Ooga Booga's face, just before the rest of him slid down the monster's gullet. He let out one final scream just before the creature's mouth closed, and all hope was swallowed, as was Luke, by the eternal blackness of death.

Luke's mother sat up in bed, distinctly having heard a struggle. Distinctly having heard Luke calling her name. It could wait until morning. Ali was tired, and she deserved to sleep. It could wait. It probably hadn't really been a call for help anyway. She snuggled up next to the warmth of her sleeping husband, and she mumbled quietly, "Just the air conditioner."

About the Author



Glenn Slade Clark, Jr. is the author of the novel *Cry, Wolf* and the collection of short stories *The Great Debate*. He lives in Dallas, Texas.