

BED TIME

Jamie was scared of the monster under her bed.

"You're a kid," said her mom. "Every kid is scared of the monster under their bed."

"So there is a monster under my bed?" Jamie asked.

"No, of course not," her mom replied. "Now go to sleep, your father and I have to argue."

Jamie closed her eyes. Downstairs she heard her mom and dad's raised voices.

How come I have to be quiet when they're making all the noise? she thought. I'm the one who's supposed to be sleeping.

Not that Jamie could sleep anyway, on account of the monster under the bed.

The monsters under Jamie's bed, Jamie knew, was different from other kinds of monster in two ways. One, they are actually real, unlike all the other kinds of monster, which are stupid and don't exist anyway. And two, nobody knows what they look like. The other kinds of monster, which are stupid and don't exist, have been shown in so many books and movie and TV shows and toys that everyone knows what they look like and it's not even scary. There are big monsters and small monsters and monsters with spots and stripes and wings and fangs and huge claws and massive jaws and pretty much every different kind of thing. There's jelly monsters and lizard monsters and probably, although it's hard to imagine, rainbow unicorn monsters. Although once Jamie had drawn a rainbow unicorn monster with her crayons, when she was really little, and it looked pretty dumb.

But the monster under Jamie's bed didn't look like anything because nobody had ever seen it. It was all flat shadows and breath in the dark. Sometimes it was a furry leg or arm stretching out from underneath the bed – just for a second – before Jamie turned on her bedside light and it went scurrying back to where it had come from.

At night, Jamie lay in her bed and trembled and tried not to think about the monster. But in the day, when it was sunny and she wasn't afraid because the world was big and bright all around her, she found she could wonder what the monster was like.

It was big, that was for sure. Jamie didn't know how it could fit under her bed, being so big, but it did. She decided it could flatten itself down and fold itself like a napkin, stuffing its thick, black fur and folding up its cruel, curling claws beneath her bed, and then, when it got the chance, it would slide out from under her, and unfurl into its true and horrid self.

"Can I get a bunk bed?" asked Jamie. "So that I can sleep on the top and put some distance between me and the monster?"

"I can't afford a bunk bed," said her dad. "Besides, if I was the monster, I'd just sleep in the bottom bunk. That way I could get some rest before climbing up and eating you. Now be quiet, I have to go and tell your mom where to get off."

That night, Jamie thought she heard the monster growl and grumble beneath her, but it was hard to hear as her mom and dad were shouting so loudly.

In the morning, Jamie found her drawing of the rainbow unicorn. It was still dumb, but she found that she kind of liked it. She had always been good at drawing and there was something lively about the unicorn. It had a big goofy smile and there was glitter on its

hooves, which Jamie thought was a nice touch. She found some pushpins and put the drawing above her bed where she could see it when she woke up and before she went to sleep.

If I go to sleep, she thought to herself, listening to the raised voices of her mom and dad coming up through the floorboards below.

That night, Jamie fell into a doze that became a light snooze and then real deep sleep. It was so deep that she didn't hear the huge, furry shape beneath her bed slide quietly out and slowly uncurl itself into its real, awful form. Nor did its hot, vile breath on her neck wake her up, or the sound of its yellow claws scraping against one another as it sharpened them.

Jamie must have been in a very deep sleep indeed, in fact, because when a noise from behind, like a whinny or a snort, caused the monster to turn – too late – and then gasp in shock and pain as something sharp and long pierced it through, she didn't wake then either. And she stayed asleep as the monster fell silently to the floor, dead, and vanished as a lone shaft of moonlight dipped over it.

But she did awake in the morning, to find something nuzzling her face. She sat up, surprised but not really surprised, like when you find you could do something you didn't think you could do, but deep down you knew it was possible. She stood up, brushed some glitter from the bedclothes and jumped off the bed onto the rainbow unicorn's back.

"Let's go," she said.