

Scary Monster  
Adult Story Winner

## Scary Monster

by James Michael Johnson

Luke is lying in bed, listening for the monster.

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The first night Luke heard the monster, he had just happened to wake up. He wasn't sure if the sounds were the regular creaking of the house or if it was all just a dream.

But the next night, and the next, he could no longer sleep as the soft sounds played out through the night.

Gentle padding footsteps. The creaking of doors and drawers opening and closing. Those last sounds convinced Luke it couldn't be an animal. Even the clever raccoons, with their little hand-like front paws, can't open drawers. If they did, they wouldn't bother to close them.

He did what children have always done. He stayed wrapped up tightly with his blankets pulled up as close to his head as possible as if the blankets could protect him.

Luke went to his mother for help, which did *not* work well. She told him, "I knew those comics and scary movies would bother you and keep you awake at night. If you keep this up, I'll have to take them away from you."

He knew he was going to have to find some proof.

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Tonight, a possibility he's dreaded has become a reality. He has to go to the bathroom. When it becomes clear he can't wait any longer, he gets up and moves to the dimly lit hallway. He tries to hurry to the bathroom, but partway there, he hears the rustling of feet moving quickly at the end of the hallway.

*"It's right here in the hallway!"*

Then he realizes, fortunately, the footsteps are moving away and down the backstairs. He's able to rush into the bathroom, take care of business (just in time), and hurry back to his bed and the security of the blanket.

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The next day, when he goes into the kitchen for breakfast, the Cheerios are gone. Not just empty, they've disappeared. It strikes Luke that this is finally proof that will convince his mother there's a monster in the house.

It is *not* convincing.

When he tells her the Cheerios are gone, she says, "You should have told me they were running low sooner. I just went to the store yesterday."

"No, they're gone! The monster must have taken them!"

She replies angrily. "It's bad enough that you make up stories to scare yourself and stay awake at night. But if you're going to make up lies, that's it. No more movies for you until you can be more responsible!"

Luke won't show emotion in front of her. He leaves the kitchen and makes it to his bedroom before he breaks down and cries.

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A little later that morning, he realizes he will have to find a way to solve this himself. After his parents leave, he decides to search through the whole house.

It's an old, rambling house with two stories, an attic, and a basement. Having front and rear stairways makes it a bit of a maze.

Searching through the first and second floors is reasonably straightforward. The rooms are familiar and are well-lit by large windows. Luke doesn't find anything that isn't just the typical disarray that comes from living in a house.

The attic is a little scarier but still pretty good. It has a fair number of light bulbs. It's just one big open room, and

he only has to look around the stacks of boxes. Holiday ornaments and forgotten things from the past.

It's the basement he dreads. At last, he heads down there. The basement is much more cluttered with shelves, the new furnace, the water heater, and the old furnace that was left in the corner. There are little dark pockets and shadows everywhere.

The main basement room has lights, and he can search all the corners, not finding anything.

The only area left is the root cellar, an unused remnant from past times. A few steps go down from the main basement to a little earthen floored area broken up into multiple rooms. There are no lights in the root cellar.

There's no way he's going to go down there right now.

While looking at the doorway to the root cellar, he notices one of the basement lights is creating a shadow from a small object lying on the floor. He walks over and picks it up..

It's a Cheerio.

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Another sleepless night, another night of soft sounds.

But Luke wakes up with a new plan. After his parents leave, he goes out to the garden shed and gets a weeding tool.

It's an imposing device. A three-foot wooden handle with a one-foot steel spike on its end. The tip of the spike is shaped

into a two-pronged "fork" with sharpened edges for digging out weeds. It looks like nothing other than a spear. The manufacturer's name, "Sullivan's All-Purpose Tools," is printed along the handle. Luke smiles, thinking, *"Sullivan probably never anticipated the use I'm planning for this."*

He takes the tool into the house and tapes a flashlight midway along the handle. He'll be able to keep both hands on the spear while still shining the light ahead.

He doesn't think he's invincible or that he's going to fight off the monster. He only feels he'll have protection as he looks around in the root cellar.

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As Luke goes down into the basement, he's so afraid that he grows more and more lightheaded and feels short of breath. Halfway across the basement, his body turns on its own and heads back to the stairs. But he's able to stop himself from leaving.

*"I've got to do this! I can't spend many more nights not sleeping!"*

At the steps to the root cellar, he dries his damp palms on his shirt, switches the flashlight on, and heads in.

The air is moist and smells musty. Cobwebs hang down and cling to his face, but he doesn't brush them away. He refuses to take his hands off the spear.

The first room of the root cellar is empty. Luke hears scurrying and rustling noises in one of the rooms to the side. He finds it's easier to move ahead now that he's come this far.

He goes into the side room and finds the creature..

Luke has no idea what it is. It stands on two legs like a person, but it's only slightly over two feet tall. It has large eyes and seems to be covered with almost bluish-colored fur.

The creature is holding its palms toward him as if trying to ward him off. It keeps slightly shifting from side to side like it's hiding something.

Luke adjusts his light a little bit and realizes there's another creature behind the first. One that's much, much smaller.

*"It's... She's... a mother, and she's trying to protect her baby from me!"*

Even though the creature seems so foreign, he can see a mixture of terror and pleading when he looks into her eyes.

Luke lowers the spear's point and holds up one hand in what he hopes is a calming gesture. He turns and leaves the root cellar.

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Luke's not going to tell his parents about the creature. And he doesn't have to be afraid anymore.

Luke realizes that, to the creature, he is the scary  
monster.