

The Monster and I

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The monster and I

It was a short and uneven fight. The vagabond awoke from his drunken stupor when the monster bowed over him. It sniffed the smelly body, the vagabond let out a short scream and the monster sent him flying down the alley with one fell swoop of its mighty claws. I heard the poor man's back break against one of the dark walls. After that there was only a soft moan as his last breath escaped him.

With two fast jumps the monster jumped on top of what was left of him and had ripped his chest open until there was the white of bone and red of blood reflecting the light of the streetlamp. It broke the ribcage and ripped at the intestines until it came to the juicy heart that it gobbled up in one greedy go.

It pulled the head off the vagabond and held it in its sharp claws. It grinned at the dead, vacant eyes and at the mouth that hung open at a weird and unnatural angle. The last of the blood dripped down to the filthy tiles and the lifeless body in the pale light, as the monster basked in the glow of victory.

The horrible grin of the monster stretched from ear to ear as it's green eyes with narrow, vertical pupils shone with a naughty glare. The grin was a row of white, sharp teeth that had one extra set hiding behind the front row in case they would break, like a shark's jaw. The head of the monster was pointed and only barely covered by the green, scaly skin that covered the rest of the awesome body. On the back it had some fading brown spots and a few spikes that jumped up like a Japanese fan whenever it felt threatened. It stood on its hind legs which hinged backwards, like a chickens, and the sharp claws retreated back into the hands and

feet now that the fight was over. Stretched to its full formidable height, the beast towered at least a meter above any grown human.

It grinned and caressed the severed head and then, with a cry so sudden that even I got a shock, it threw the head of the vagabond against the wall and I heard the nauseating crack as the skull shattered like a ripe nut. In one jump it got to where the skull lay and with the sharp nails, some scary precision and the patience of a toddler, it peeled the face of the skull and tossed it behind him where it hit the wall and for a moment, hung there like some macabre painting before it slowly fell to the ground. It shook the remaining pieces of the skull onto the street and gave a short yank to sever the brain from the last few vertebrae. What remained of the splintered skull, it dropped it into the gutter.

The creature slowly sank into a crouching position and I heard it growl softly in satisfaction. It was completely consumed with the brain. The rest of the world was far, far away from it. It stuck a nail into the grey matter and licked its finger. For those who didn't know any better or failed to see what it was eating, I'm sure it would have looked very endearing.

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I hiding, watching it from somewhere in the shadows of a tall apartment building. It had been raining and the air felt so moist and cold, it stuck to my bones. The many lights of the many apartment buildings reflected against the white clouds that hung overhead and for the people in that oncoming plane,

preparing for landing, it must have looked somewhat magical. They were probably taking pictures of it.

There was no wind and the only traffic on the streets tonight was far away. Besides that low buzz in the distance, everything was silent.

In the alley there was only the pale light of the one street-lamp. It shone upon the bloody scene and threw huge shadows of the beast against the walls that made it all look just a little bit worse than it already was.

I watched and sighed, wondering, not for the first time, if this too was a creature of God. Or if maybe it originated from somewhere else. Nobody could ever find out, because nobody who ever met it, lived long enough to investigate. The creature was a hunter and evolution had equipped it with the best weapons available, like opposable thumbs, regeneration of lost limbs and a low sort of intellect that let it figure out how doors worked. It had eyes that saw in the dark and an amazing sense of smell. It wouldn't be long at all now until it would notice me. And that's what I was waiting for. Until that time I would stand here, smoking my cigarette in the moist night air.

I chuckled when I realised that, if it ever had any offspring, kids would probably nag their parents to take one of these small, peeping reptiles home to keep in their glass tanks, to feed it small crickets until it grew and grew and started to demand birds and small mammals. But as soon as it started to look disturbingly like a deformed little human, when it started to walk on its hind legs, father would take it into a cardboard box and drive it far from the city to let it out in nature where it could feed and peel and grow and grow some more until it was as

big as the one here in the alley and hunger would lead it back to the city.

Why not, I thought, they did it with crocodiles in the late 1700's. Now we have sewers full of them.

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When the brain lost its appeal, the monster ate it like one of us would eat an apple, stretched itself back to its full height and walked over to the fallen body. With a few strikes of its mighty arms, it destroyed the ribcage and found the juiciest bits from between the intestines. As it gulped down the pieces one by one, it raised its face to the cloudy skies and I saw the blood around its mouth in the light of street lamp. I heard the smacking as it gobbled up the rest of the poor vagabond and when it was done, it licked the blood from its lips with the long dark tongue.

All that was left on the alley floor were the remains of an arm, a leg, a few loose ribs and some blood that would soon be washed away if it rained again tonight.

I threw the butt of my cigarette into a puddle and heard it hiss. I took a deep breath and felt the cold night air in my chest. The monster turned and dropped its mighty jaw, while it noticed me across the street. The bloody claws hung down to the ground and the heavy body contracted and expanded as it breathed the same cold air as thousands of other people did in this filthy city. It watched me, waiting. Somewhere in its cloudy, dark mind, it recognized me and took a careful

step forward. I put one hand in my pocket and stretched the other one out, daring it to come.

The monster leapt forward like an arrow leaving a bow. It crossed the street in two short jumps, landing in front of me so quietly that I could hear the loose cement fall from the wall to the street.

As soon as it stood there, I raised my outstretched hand to its enormous head, while the other appeared from the deep pocket of my coat with the habitual piece of chicken breast. With one quick movement of its tongue it took the meat to its mouth and swallowed it. I put my hand right behind the eyes as it looked at me. The uneven scales of the green skin felt wet and cold. It growled softly for a moment as it glanced back into the alley.

“There,” I said. “Well done. Belly full?”

It growled again as I petted it on the neck.

“Good,” I said and shivered. “It's a cold one tonight.”

As I stepped out of the shadows, I noticed a slight drizzle had started to come down, that would soon turn into real rain that would last all night. As I tapped my thigh twice, the creature growled again and plodded behind me reluctantly as we started off home where it would be nice and warm.

Word by the author

In the summer of 2004 I was hiking the West Highland Way in Scotland. Unfortunately, I sprained a little muscle in my foot which disabled me to hike for long periods of time with a 12 kg heavy backpack on my back. I found myself taking busses through Scotland on an experience which finally lead me to the Orkney Islands.

On my way north I stayed two nights at the foot of Ben Nevis in Fort William, camping in my small tent on a nice campsite. I had gone up that day in the radiant sunlight and later that evening I had spent an agreeable evening with some of the volunteers and safety staff and after a few beers I retired. As happened often in those days, I woke up at around four o'clock, not being able to return to sleep. I went for a small walk in the area around the campsite to clear my mind and catch some fresh air. On my way I met an elderly men quietly walking his dog. He greeted me and smiled friendly at me and I greeted back, wondering if four o'clock was the best time to walk one's dog. Returning to the campsite, this thought didn't let me go and my mind was already racing with the many possibilities. I undid my shoes and swung my feet into the tent. Lying on my sleeping bag, staring at the canvas, trying to will myself to close my eyes, they idea of 'The monster and I' slipped into my brain. I wrote it down in short hand on my notepad and as I was writing sleep was already coming. I believe I finished it lying on my side, by the light of my electric torch.

Back home, I submitted it to Holland SF magazine and it was published in 2006 in it's original Dutch translation.

Marcel