

THE BOY AND THE BEAST UNDER THE BED: A TALE FOR BELIEVERS

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"Pssst!"

The Boy woke up, and peered over the side of his bed to see what was making that sound. A pair of glowing, yellow eyes stared out at him from the darkness.

"Who are you?", he asked.

"I am the Beast Under the Bed", whispered the Beast under the bed.

"Leave me alone. I'm trying to sleep", the Boy said, and pulled his blanket over his head. The Boy expected the Beast to go away, but it didn't. Every night, the hissing got louder, and more urgent.

"Psssst! Psssst!", went the Beast.

Finally, the Boy could bear it no longer, and asked, "What the f**k do you want?"

"I want something", said the Beast. "If you give it to me, I'll go away and leave you be."

"Well, what is it?", asked the Boy.

"If I see it, I will tell you", the Beast answered.

The Boy thought hard, but could not imagine what monsters wanted, especially those that lived under bedroom furniture.

The next day, he decided to try his luck at pleasing the Beast. It was fine and sunny, as most days on a tropical island are, so he walked to a lake not too far from his home. The lake had been created by a large dam built in a river, and was surrounded by trees.

The water of the lake was a clear, brilliant blue. It sparkled beneath the light of the midday sun, almost unnaturally so.

The Boy was pleased with what he saw, and thought to himself, "The water is so blue. Maybe if I dipped my handkerchief in it, it will become that beautiful colour too, and the Beast will want it."

He dipped his handkerchief in the water, and indeed it turned a shade of blue almost as brilliant as the lake. He tucked it into his pocket. That night, he showed it to the Beast when it began hissing at him as usual.

"The handkerchief is beautiful, but it is not what I want", said the Beast, as its eyes turned a colder colour in the dark, and the hissing grew even louder.

On the second day, the Boy returned to the lake. He looked around him as he stood in the middle of the woods surrounding the lake, and liked what he saw. There were bushes bearing fragrant flowers, and trees fecund with fruit.

One particular tree bore luscious orange fruit, with golden dots on the skin that gleamed like round, metallic coins in the sun. They looked enticing, and the Boy decided to pluck several for the Beast, in the hopes that he would want them.

He offered his fruit to the Beast that night. "The fruit looks succulent, but it is not what I want", said the Beast, as its eyes became cold once more, and it hissed.

On the third day, the Boy again returned to the lake. He plucked one of the flowers for the Beast. The flower was small and delicate, and bore purple petals at its centre, with a ring of pale pink petals around it. The boy put it in his pocket, and went home with it.

That night, he placed the flower on a cushion of black velvet, and showed it to the Beast.

"The flower is exquisite, but it is not what I want", said the Beast, as its eyes turned cold, and it hissed.

The Boy thought to himself, "The lake has no more to offer me. Maybe I can make something that the Beast will want."

On the fourth day, he entered the kitchen, and made a sweet pudding. It was the colour of Demerara sugar, or molasses, and it wobbled slightly when the Boy set it in a plate, and put a layer of whipped cream on it, with a bright red cherry on top.

The Boy brought his dessert to the Beast that night, and the hissing was louder than usual.

"The pudding looks delectable, but it is not what I want", said the Beast, with eyes cold as the night.

On the fifth day, the Boy sat down at his desk, and draw a maze on a piece of paper. He liked mazes, and enjoyed finding his way through them. He hoped that the Beast, too, would be distracted by his maze, and agree to go away.

That night, he gave the Beast his drawing of a maze.

"The maze is interesting, but it is not what I want", said the Beast, with cold yellow eyes, and the hissing was as loud as ever.

On the sixth day, the Boy discovered that he was running out of ideas. He was at a loss, and decided to offer the Beast something naughty. "Perhaps the Beast will want a naughty thing", he thought.

He wrote down his offer on a piece of paper, and handed it to the Beast that night with a flourish.

The hissing was so loud that the Boy was afraid it would wake someone up. "I do not want your naughty offer", hissed the Beast, with eyes glittering as cold as false light.

On the seventh day, the Boy had no more ideas left. As the tales we listen to are wont to tell us, the seventh day marks the end of a cycle, and the Boy was at the end of his.

He looked at himself in the mirror, and saw his face, and decided that he did not like his nose, which was round and flat and ugly. He thought that, after all, perhaps what the Beast might want was really a part of himself.

He cut off his nose, and put it on a black cushion, and gave it to the Beast.

The yellow eyes glowed at him from the darkness under his bed. "I see that you have cut your nose off as an offering, but I still do not want it", said the Beast, and the eyes were cold, and the hissing began once more.

"You have failed", hissed the Beast. "You have not given me what I want."

The Boy, who had grown weary of trying to give the Beast what it wanted, decided to give up the search. He lay down on his bed, and closed his eyes, and tried very hard to get used to being nose-less and to the hissing sounds coming from under his bed.

"You have failed", hissed the Beast.

The Boy ignored it. The bed began shaking very hard, as if something underneath was creating an angry ruckus. It flopped up and down on the floorboards like a fish out of water, and the Boy hung on the sides as tightly as he could.

After what seemed like a very long time, the bed stopped moving. The hissing sound also stopped. The Boy looked out the window, and saw that the sun was up. He looked over the side of the bed, and could no longer see the cold, glowing eyes of the Beast.

"Maybe it went away on its own", the Boy thought.

He looked around him at his room, and saw the things that the Beast had rejected. He saw the handkerchief, the colour of the brilliant blue lake. He saw the orange fruit with golden dots, and the pink-and-purple flower. He saw the pudding and the drawing of the maze and the naughty phrase scribbled on a crumpled sheet of paper and his nose, which was once attached to his face.

He liked what he saw. "I like these things", he said. "They were good ideas, even if the Beast did not want them."

"Maybe the next Beast under the bed will think differently."

And it turned out to be a good day for the Boy, as he busied himself with arranging the things he had collected around the room. He put the handkerchief by the window, in the sun, so that it glistened just like the clear blue waters of the lake.