

Monsters

Erin Meadows

MY NAME IS Elliot and I'm 11 years old. I live with my Ma, her name is Mary, just like the Virgin Mary. I came to her when I was just three, I remember, because I was so scared. I'd never seen a woman like Mary, but now I call her my Ma. Sometimes people stare at us when we walk down the street, Ma says this is because we look so different. But my Ma, well she said that doesn't matter and that God prefers people like me anyway so I shouldn't be worrying about that. I thought she meant that God wouldn't like her, because she's not like me, but my Ma, well she just said 'Elliot, worry about how you love God and not how he loves you. I make my own sacrifices to the Lord and that will spare me.'

'What sacrifices?' I'd ask, but she just shook her head and pulled me along the street.

We live in a big house on top of a hill, away from the other houses in the town. In our house we have an upstairs and a downstairs. Ma never lets me go downstairs. She says it's where the monsters are and if I go down there, they'll try to eat me. But I don't believe her, I know they're just hungry. Ma says she put them there to keep away the baddies and if I tell anyone, then I'll be put down there too. But I got no one to tell nothing to because I don't have any friends, except for God that is.

Once, I went downstairs when Ma was putting the washing out, and I saw them, those monsters. When I opened the door, they made all this noise, huffing and puffing like the three little pigs. When I heard my Ma, flip-flopping back up the path, I raced up the steps but tripped and scratched my knee real bad. I shut the door on those pigs and ran back to my room but when my Ma came past, I was all huffing and puffing

just like them, down there. I tried to cover my knee with my hand but I knew she'd seen the blood; it's like she can smell it. Ma came over with the washing basket and placed it down real slow, like it was a baby or something. I tried to catch my breath, but it couldn't be caught and I couldn't find any more air in my lungs, so all I could hear was my own huffing. My Ma, well she just sat down right beside me and touched my knee. She smeared my blood onto her finger and made the sign of the holy cross on my thigh and then she sucked on her bloody finger like a baby with its pacifier.

'ELLIOT . . . you know what Jesus said, unless you eat the son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you! Now get up, make this bed, say your prayers and don't think that I don't know what you been up to. You go down there again and I'll make sure you have no life in you. Those little monsters will eat your face and choke you dead with your own spinal cord.'

I just nodded my head, I know better than to test my Ma. But I know she's lying, even if it is only a white one. But the monsters I saw down there, well, they weren't monsters, they were just little boys. Hungry little boys with missing limbs.

After that I tried not to go down there. I tried not to think about the shackles and the shit smell, their toothless smiles and their limbless bodies. But every night, long after I'd said my prayers and wiped clean any sins I might have caught, I could hear them, from all the way downstairs. I could hear them crawling those walls and moaning. I could hear my Ma preaching like a gospel singer. But those sounds that they made, well, they weren't pretty like that. Oh no. Those hungry little boys, well, they were no choir. But after a little thumping and cracking, well those boys, they were quiet. And my Ma, well, she would come up the stairs and into my room and sit upon the rocking chair. I closed my eyes tight, feigned sleep and half listened to her saying her rosaries. After sometime, I'd fall asleep and in the morning, she'd be gone away again.

Sometimes my Ma, well, she'd just go away for a few days but she'd leave me a note and this one I recognised from the Bible:

'Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him' John 14:21.

I understood what my Ma meant, I could almost hear her deep voice in

my ear ‘Elliot, do not go downstairs, do not open the door, if you do not obey me, I won’t love you and neither will God.’ On the first day I did not go downstairs. The house was even quiet at night; there were no monsters, no sounds, not even from downstairs.

On the second night, well, I heard some noises all right, loud, crying, shameful noises. I tried to ignore them. I read my Bible and I made a paper plane. I pretended to be my Ma and thought about what she would do. My Ma, well she’d get upset, she’d get angry and she’d say, ‘Elliot, get to your room and do some reading and don’t you come out now, until I tell you, those monsters there are going to get it,’ and then she would stomp downstairs, open that door right up and walk straight on in. So that’s exactly what I did.

I yelled at the top of my lungs ‘RIGHHHHT, you monsters, you are going to get it, you going to get it now!’ and I stomped all the way downstairs. I opened up that door again and I saw them there. Only two hungry, little boys this time, not three. One was whimpering and whining and pulling itself along with a mangled little arm whilst the other sat upright in the corner, swinging his armless torso, left then right. Just beside the door in front of me, was a tiny, little foot like thing. It was creeping and crawling all by itself! I knelt down beside it and picked at it; pulled away a maggot and kicked it right across the room. I thought it must have been that third boy, the one that wasn’t there no more. The other boys, they didn’t speak to me, didn’t look at me, but boy did they look sad. These little boys, well, they looked like my Ma. They looked much more like her than I ever could. These little boys, well, they couldn’t be monsters, not if they were born from my Ma. I hightailed back up the stairs and into the kitchen. I pulled out some leftovers and raced back downstairs. I placed the food, amongst the squalor onto the shit stained floor and those boys, well they ate it as best they could.

On the third night, my Ma, well she came home. I heard her from my bedroom, dragging something along the hall. I closed my eyes tight as she went by, but I felt her stop at my door, before proceeding down the stairs with a thump, thump, thump. When the preaching started, the singing, the screeching and the screaming, I rose from my bed, threw the covers off and tiptoed down the dimly lit hall. I crept down those stairs and peeked through that door. I could see my Ma, my Ma and those boys, but now not two, but four. I saw her blessing them before she began the

sacrifice. She sang hymns to the sound of the hacksaw, her big, wide, hips swinging as she went. Limb after limb, bone after bone she collected chunks of meat and with a thump and crack, that little boy broke. My Ma, she said, 'I tell the truth, I eat the flesh of my son and drink the blood, let me have life from you, oh Lord.'

And with that, I ran those stairs once more, thanked the lord and leapt into bed. I must have fallen asleep for it was sometime later when I heard my Ma coming up those stairs. One foot in front of the other she lifted her heaving body into the room. She knelt down beside me and with one hand on my brow she whispered, 'O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of Hell and lead all souls to heaven, especially those who are in most need of thy mercy.'

This time, I peeped through my tightly closed eyelids to see her, clutching her rosary beads and smiling, with the blood of the little boy, that little monster, all over her face.