

Kentucky Fried Fairy

By

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CHAPTER ONE

Sadly Devoid of Explosions

In an ideal world this story would begin with an explosion. Everyone loves an explosion. Well, provided they're not slap bang in the middle of it, of course, in which case it tends to slip right down the top ten list of favourite things. For those not caught in the fiery heart of one, however, there's very little to compare to the thrill of an explosion, and it is with great regret that this tale does not begin with one.

That is not to say that there won't be an explosion or two later. That, I'm delighted to announce, is a distinct possibility. I'm not going to give too much away and say there will *definitely* be an explosion, but there is most certainly a very good chance of one taking place. While explosions may - or may not - loom on the horizon, they are not, as I've said, how this story begins. Instead, this story opens with a boy. He's fast asleep at the moment, but that won't last.

Before he wakes, let's take a tiptoe round the bedroom he sleeps in to see if we can get a feel for who he is. This is not going to be easy, I should point out, largely due to the fact that this is not actually his room. To make things even more complex, it's not even his house. To cause us still further problems, this is the first

time in his life he's ever slept in this house, let alone this room. With that in mind then, let's see what we can find out.

The room is largely in darkness at the moment, with the only illumination coming from the faint, silvery glow of the full moon which floats, heavy and fat, in the night sky outside. Were the room to boast a pair of curtains we would almost certainly be stumbling our way through the dark, but fortunately for us the single small window is bare, and so the pale lunar illumination through the glass is enough to light our way.

The walls, it seems, are as bare as the window. Not only are they devoid of pictures, posters or other decoration, they are also distinctly lacking in wallpaper or paint. A collection of unopened paint tins and brushes in the corner suggests this will not be the case for long, but the thick layer of dust atop each tin begs to differ. Only time shall tell.

The floor? You've guessed it – completely bare. No carpet, no tiles, no linoleum, nothing. Instead the surface is made up of exposed wooden boards, and not those stylish shiny ones either. No, we're talking dirty, unsanded planks of wood with rusty nails holding them together, and splinters stabbing up towards the unpainted ceiling. I should, perhaps, have made sure you were wearing sturdy shoes before inviting you to sneak around the bedroom with me. My apologies if you are not, but a pair of tweezers, some bed rest and a liberal application of *Grundhulg's Ointment for Trifling Wounds* and I'm confident you'll be as right as rain.

The entire room has a sense, not of being unfinished, but of being unstarted. It is a room which is yet to become a room. But it is a room, all the same, of tremendous significance.

There are other rooms in this house, of course, but while they are all important in their own mundane way, none can hold a candle to this one in terms of relevance to the story you are about to read. For the purposes of this story, in fact,

you can forget about the other rooms within this house, because from this sentence onwards they will never be mentioned again.

Except the bathroom. I almost forgot about the bathroom, which is also quite significant, although not nearly as significant as this room. We will have to come to the bathroom later, however, since the boy who begins this story is about to wake up. So let us slink away through the moonlight and out through the open bedroom door, lest he catches us here. We wouldn't want to frighten him now, would we? Particularly when he's going to be quite terror-stricken as it is, having just come to the conclusion that there is a monster under his bed. Things are about to get noisy, so brace yourself.

Ready? Good, because here he goes now.

CHAPTER TWO

No Such Thing as Monsters

“CLAAAAAAAAAIRE!” screamed Ben, as he sprung awake, the monstrously terrifying imagery of his nightmare already beginning to replay in his mind. The moon cast eerie shadows of the trees outside, projecting them like twisted shadow puppets upon the uncovered walls. Bare autumn branches swayed in the cold midnight breeze, sending spindly shadows scuttling across the walls and ceiling, scratching and clawing at the boy in the bed.

Thump.

Ben froze. The machine-gun staccato of his own heartbeat almost deafened him as it crashed in his ears, but he was sure there had been another sound – a muffled thud from somewhere close by. He held his breath tightly and tried not to move, hoping the sound would not come again, but knowing more surely than he’d known anything in all his nine years of living that it would only be a matter of time before—

Thump.

He squeaked in terror and scrunched himself into a tight ball in the middle of the bed, frantically pulling the covers up and over his head. He flapped about, panicked, as he hurried to ensure every part of his body was safely protected by the duvet from whatever it was that had made the noise.

Whatever it was that was *under his bed*.

In the darkness of his duvet shield Ben trembled and shook, beads of sweat already forming on his forehead as his unsteady breath quickly warmed the pocket of air around him. No matter how uncomfortable he became, however, no matter how hot he got, being in here was still much preferable to facing up to whatever it was that was out *there*.

Creak.

Ben whimpered and tightly closed his eyes. The snarling, blood-soaked fangs of the creatures in his nightmare bit at him through the blackness, as the foul stench of death wafted from the darkest depths of his imagination. Somewhere, just outside his protective bubble, something gave a low, unholy groan. Ben screamed and covered his head with his arms, as hands much bigger than his own snatched the duvet away in one sharp movement.

"What is it?" Claire snapped, as she dropped the duvet to the floor and rubbed sleep from her half-shut eyes. Ben slowly opened one eye and peeked up at his big sister as she loomed over him, her hair dishevelled and standing on end like she'd been repeatedly electrocuted in her sleep.

"There's a monster!" he whispered, doing his best not to draw any more unwanted attention to himself than he already had. "There's a monster under the bed!"

Claire blinked slowly as she looked down at the tightly packed knot of arms and legs which shivered in the centre of the bed. The satisfying memory of her own

warm quilt and fluffy pillows beckoned her as she picked up Ben's covers and dumped them back down on top of him.

"There's no such thing as monsters," she sighed, as she turned and made for the door. "Go back to sleep."

"What is it? What happened?" blurted their dad, as he crashed into the doorframe, spun three hundred and sixty degrees, and stumbled into the room, struggling to stay upright. "What's all the screaming for?"

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Aaaaaaand freeze.

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking: "No explosions in chapter one, and no monsters by half way through chapter two?". You're thinking: "What kind of book is this?". All in good time, my friend, all in good time. And yes, it's too late to get your money back. I know you were thinking that, too.

While I'm still unwilling to reveal whether the story will feature an actual, bona fide explosion between now and the final page, I don't think it's giving too much away to confirm that it will most certainly contain monsters. All manner of monsters, in fact: Big monsters, little monsters, angry monsters, happy monsters, monsters with frankly atrocious personal hygiene, and monsters who don't actually look like monsters at all. Those are the worst kind of monsters of the lot, but don't worry, there aren't many of that particular type. Just the one.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Here we are racing headlong towards the future when the present is very nearly as interesting. Okay, that's a wild exaggeration. Perhaps 'here we are racing headlong towards the future when the present is *very nearly interesting*' would have been more factually accurate. Still, we're here now, so we may as well make the most of it.

There they are - our cast of characters. Not all of them, obviously. What kind of story would it be with only three characters? No, we'll meet the other

participants in the tale later, but for now let us focus on the trio here within this room-which-is-not-yet-a-room.

Let's look first at Ben. Poor little nine-year-old Ben, all curled up upon the bed. His sandy yellow hair and a single green eye are all we can see of Ben's head and face at the moment, thanks to his arms, which are still thrown up in protection against whatever supernatural menace lurks beneath the bedstead. He's being silly, of course. I can see right under the bed from where I'm standing, and there isn't a monster in sight. You try telling Ben that, though.

You see, were you to ask Ben if he believes in monsters he would not, as you may expect him to, answer "yes". Instead he would most likely look at you like you had recently escaped from *Ratched's Insanatorium for the Mad*, before running away as fast as his legs would carry him. This is not because Ben doesn't believe in monsters, it is because he believes in them to such an extent that the possibility of them not existing is one he has simply never considered. To Ben, monsters are as real as the bed he currently covers on, or the book you currently hold in your hand. Some would say this means Ben's imagination is too active and vivid for his own good, when in reality it means Ben is an extremely perceptive little boy.

His sister Claire, on the other hand, claims not to believe in such childish flights of fancy. For someone so adamant that monsters do not exist, however, she is extremely quick to panic when awaking in the night to find the room in darkness and her feet poking out from under the covers.

Of course Claire is older, and this may go some way to explain her dismissive attitude towards the notion of inhuman abominations existing below Ben's bed, or anywhere else for that matter. She's twelve now, almost thirteen, and it would not do for someone about to enter their teenage years to be concerning themselves with thoughts of monsters now, would it? Particularly not when there are such things as make-up and boys to think about.

Only Claire doesn't wear make-up, and she doesn't particularly like boys that much either. Not unless they can beat her time on the *Death Plunge* downhill mountain bike track she built on the hillside behind her house, and no-one – boy or girl - has ever so much as come close to matching her time, much less beating it.

There is a pretty young girl inside Claire, just waiting to get out. One gets the impression, however, that if she ever does get out, Claire will waste no time whatsoever in beating her around the head until she goes back in.

Lastly we come to Dad. That's not his real name, of course, but for the purposes of this story it is the only one we need. Dad very much does *not* believe in monsters, although if he did he would likely suspect his ex-wife – Ben and Claire's mother – of being one. She isn't, of course, but Dad is a little too stubborn, a little too ignorant and lot too insensitive to realise this.

Dad moved out when Ben was six, although both children remember at least a year of arguing going on between their parents before then, followed by several months in which neither of them seemed to speak to each other at all. Then one day Ben and Claire came home from school to find their mum smiling a broad but false smile, and their dad gone.

Being a psychologist, Dad put the break-up down to his fear of commitment, which he'd say stemmed from the feelings of loss and guilt he felt when his older brother, Kenny, disappeared when Dad was nine years old. They had been playing Hide and Seek, and though everyone from Dad to the police had done their best to fulfil the 'Seek' part of the game, Kenny was never seen again. For years Dad imagined him still out there somewhere, hiding, waiting patiently to be found. Sometimes he imagines it even now.

Mum, on the other hand, would put the break-up down to Dad being moody, self-centred and impossible to live with. The truth, as these things usually are, was probably somewhere between the two.

After he left Dad threw himself into his work, which Mum said was another of the reasons for them falling out in the first place. Now he only manages to come to see Ben and Claire one weekend a month and every second holiday.

This is because Dad's job is very important. Not, perhaps, as important as he thinks, but important all the same. He always sends expensive, if sometimes poorly selected presents at birthdays and Christmas, and while he'd love to see more of his children it's not easy to find the time when you're busy helping people sort their lives out.

This is his house, incidentally, which he only moved into a few months ago, and which Ben and Claire are visiting for the first time. It's not easy to find the time to decorate when you're busy helping people sort their lives out, either, which explains why the room we are in looks the way it does.

So there we have it. Now that you're a little more familiar with our cast let's take a peek at what they're up to. Things *may* be about to get a little more exciting.

But I wouldn't hold your breath.

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"He thinks there's a monster under his bed," Claire shrugged.

"There is," Ben protested, still in a shrill whisper. "I heard it."

Dad exhaled, relieved, and leaned against the wall, sending a small spider scuttling for its life away from his hand.

"Is that all?" he breathed, chuckling. "I thought there was something really wrong!"

"There *is* something really wrong," Ben insisted, tears welling in his eyes.

"There is a monster under my--"

"Don't be such a cry baby," Claire groaned, trying hard not to waken up any more than she had so she could quickly get back to sleep. "Give it a rest!"

"But--"

"Claire's right, Ben," Dad nodded. "You're being silly, there's no such thing as monsters. Go back to sleep."

"But I..." Ben began to argue, before realising he was almost shouting. "But I heard it," he continued, lowering his voice once again for safety's sake. "I heard it moving about down there!"

Dad rubbed his eyes and shook his head. "I'll prove it to you, okay?" he said, getting down on his knees and looking under the bed. "I'll crawl under and prove there's nothing under there. Will that convince you?"

Ben nodded, hesitantly. "But be careful," he whimpered.

The children watched on as Dad lay down on his belly on the floor and commando crawled his way under the bed, muttering to himself as splinters jabbed into his legs through his pyjamas.

"See?" he said, once his head and shoulders were hidden from view. "I told you there was..." His voice trailed off. "Hang on," he said after a pause. "What's this?"

"What's what?" Claire asked, trying not to appear even the slightest bit nervous, despite the uneasy feeling which was growing within her. "What have you-"

Dad's scream cut her sentence short, as his legs began to kick and thrash in a frenzied panic. Ben leapt off the bed as if it had suddenly burst into flame, and darted over to his sister. By the time he reached her, all three occupants of the room were screaming as loudly as each other.

"AAAAAAARRRRRGHHHH!" Dad shrieked, his legs still flailing about wildly as he struggled to get free. "HELP ME!"

"Waddawedo, waddawedo?" Ben howled, tears of terror streaming down his cheeks as he clung tightly to his sister's arm.

"Grab his legs!" Claire wailed, clinging to Ben as tightly as he clung to her. "Grab his legs and pull him out!"

"HURRY, PLEASE, GOD, *HURRY!*" the muffled voice below the bed screamed, as the children each took hold of one of their father's legs. Their own legs wobbling like barely-set jelly, Ben and Claire heaved with all their might as they tried to pull Dad free.

"It's no use," Ben wept. "He's stuck!"

"Pull harder," Claire shrilled, her eyes wide open now for the first time since she'd entered the room. "On three, okay? One. Two."

"Three!" they both shouted in unison, as they dug in their heels and pulled and pulled and pulled until, finally, they felt their dad begin to move. With a *thud* they landed on their bottoms on the unsanded floor, both breathing heavily. Dad was free of the bed, but he still lay face down and unmoving on the bare boards of wood.

The children exchanged a worried glance as they got to their feet and cautiously approached their fallen father.

"D-dad?" Ben whispered, his voice hoarse and wobbly, as he reached out a hand to touch his dad on the shoulder. "Are you oka--"

"BOO!" Dad shouted, as he quickly spun around and made both Ben and Claire leap into the air in fright. Tears of laughter rolled down his cheeks as he clambered to his feet, delighting in his prank. "You should see your faces," he chortled, as Ben and Claire stared at him, their mouths hanging open in shock. "Oh, I wish I had my camera!"

"That was horrible!" Claire snapped, as she hurried to wipe away her tears of terror. "What did you do that for?"

"Oh come on," Dad smiled, weakly. "It was only a joke!"

"Well it wasn't very funny," Ben replied, trying hard to keep his bottom lip from wobbling. "It wasn't funny at all!"

Dad looked from son to daughter and back again, and stopped smiling. "Okay, sorry, you're right," he admitted, holding up his hands in apology. "It was misjudged. I thought it would make you laugh, that's all!"

"Well it didn't," sniffed Ben.

"I realise that, Benny," Dad nodded. He was the only person to still call Ben by that name. Despite his protests, Ben secretly quite liked it. Right now, though, he hated it. "I'm sorry that I scared you," Dad continued. "Both of you."

"Scared?" Claire sneered, turning her back on him. "I wasn't scared."

"Well I nearly cacked my pants," Ben admitted.

"I'm sorry," Dad repeated, a genuinely repentant expression on his face. "It was a stupid thing to do. But what I said is still true, Benny," he reassured.

"There's really no such thing as monst--"

The hands which shot out from under the bed and grabbed hold of Dad's bony ankles were blue. That was the first thing Ben noticed. The second thing he noticed was that they were big. Very big, in fact. Bigger than any hands he had ever seen. The third thing he noticed was his dad's head hitting the floor, which was followed almost immediately by the fourth thing, which was Dad being yanked very quickly under the bed and out of sight.

"Um...Claire," Ben mumbled, hardly daring move even the muscles on his face.

"What is it?" she scowled, as she spun on the spot to face her brother. Her brow furrowed as she glanced around the gloom of the moonlit room. "Where's Dad?" she asked, eventually.

Ben's voice was an inaudible squeak as he pointed a quivering finger towards the dark shadow below his bed. Claire rolled her eyes and got down on her knees.

"Yes, very funny," she tutted as she peered into the cramped, dark, and dusty space. "Now come out, Dad, and stop fooling around."

Shadows of branches scratched across the bare walls as a sliver of moonlight briefly illuminated the empty space under the bedstead. Claire swallowed, nervously.

"Dad?" she gulped.

But Dad was gone.