

# Monsters in the Night

By C. Jade Wyton

*Two young tabaxi girls have snuck out of their family's nursery at night to play in the woods; unaware of the severity of the danger they're putting themselves in.*

***Contains depictions of violence and heavily implied child death.***

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The night was cold and crisp; Autumn had just begun, and with it came the crunch of leaves on the forest floor and the smell of fast-cooling air as the moon rose to its mid-point in the sky, beautiful and big and silver.

Two young tabaxi girls, barely past the age of five, chased each other through the dark. They giggled quietly, muffling their laughter with their hands as to not be heard by the creatures of the night....

They weren't sure what creatures, exactly, they were supposed to be careful of. Their mother had only warned them to stay inside after dark, "er'else the monsters'll get you."

But they'd snuck out anyway, as the rest of the family slept, being careful not to wake their cousins in the shared family nursery as they made their way out the window and into the nearby woods to play hide-and-seek and tag.

The two girls blended into the night; their dark black pelts melting into the shadows, and their white markings resembling well the dabbling moonlight through the trees.

Cloudy Night Sky was in the lead, today. She had won their game at breakfast, and so the day belonged to her; she got to choose whatever they did and wherever they went. Not that Shining Luna was bothered by the choices. They were like-minded girls, with similar thoughts and interests, and so often wanted the same things.

*'Luna! Luna, look!'* the hushed voice came from up ahead.

'Huh?' Luna hurried to catch up with her sister, who raised a hand to hold her back before she broke through the bushes. 'What is it, Sky?'

*'Shh!'* Sky hushed Luna, before pointing. *'Unicorn!'*

Luna's ears flicked up at the word, and she followed her sister's eyes to the beautiful white creature that stood before them.

It was a small creature; a lot less horse-like than the unicorns in their story books, resembling more of a deer or a goat. But still very, *very* beautiful.

*'Wow,'* Luna breathed, leaning forward to get a better look. *'She's beautiful—'*

The child slipped, falling forward through the bush and tumbling into a heap on the ground.

The unicorn's head lifted from its grazing and it stomped an angry hoof.

'Who goes there!' it demanded. "This is my home, and I do not sanction visitors!"

'I-I'm sorry!' Luna exclaimed, stumbling to her feet. 'I didn't mean to! I was

just trying to look!

‘Look? *Look?!*’ the unicorn gave an offended gasp. ‘I am not some animal in a zoo, you little urchin! You intrude on my home to *spy*? Are you set by your adults to lure me out so they may capture me?! I am no fool! I know how mortals hunt my kind!’

‘No! We snuck out!’ Luna exclaimed, glancing back at her sister— Only to realise Sky had seemingly vanished. ‘Um....’

‘We?’ repeated the unicorn, its voice dripping with venom and disgust. ‘There are more than one of you?’

Luna gave a nervous nod; and the unicorn stomped another hoof as she rose to her feet and stumbled.

For a moment, Luna looked around for an escape. Then she saw, behind the unicorn, a shimmering body of water, and her eyes went wide and her ears pressed back.

‘What is that?’ she asked aloud. ‘It’s so beautiful.’

‘You keep your filthy mortal eyes to yourself!’ the unicorn hissed, taking a step towards the child. ‘You are not worthy to even *look* at my oasis!’

‘The oasis?!’ Luna gave a squeak, and covered her mouth.

She’d heard stories of the oasis in the woods; a magical place that soothed the pains of those who were ill— Its water ran deep underground, to a well in town. But by the time it reached the well it was weakened.... This beautiful, sparkling water looked so much more magical. She could only imagine the power it held.

‘Stop *staring* at *my* oasis!’ the unicorn snapped, rearing on its hind legs and slamming its hoofs down beside Luna, who gasped and stumbled. ‘This is a *holy* place! A place where the blood of gods has been spilt! You are not worthy to walk here! No mortal is! It is *mine*! And I shall protect it from the impure and the contemptible!’

‘I-I’m sorry!’ Luna exclaimed; then she screamed in fear as the unicorn reared up at her again, and she barely dodged its hooves. ‘I won’t tell anyone it’s here! I won’t! I promise!’

‘No! I’ll see that you won’t!’ the unicorn snapped, lowering its head and aiming its horn at the girl.

A light began to glow within the crystal-like horn as it lunged forward, as if to stab Luna— And then it gave a sharp cry as a rock collided with its horn, shattering an inch off the tip and causing a spark that backfired and struck the unicorn in the face.

‘Luna!’

Luna looked to the voice and saw her sister, slingshot in hand, standing braced in the bushes.

‘Luna! *Run!*’

Luna didn’t need to be told twice. She rushed to Sky’s side and they took up running together through the woods; the furious and pained screaming of the unicorn fading behind them.

And even when they couldn’t hear the unicorn’s shouts, they kept on running. Until their lungs ached and their legs hurt and their heads spun.

Luna collapsed to the ground, wheezing, as Sky doubled over with her hands on her knees and swallowed to wet her throat.

‘I thought you ran away!’ Luna managed, shivering. ‘I thought you left me!’  
‘Nuh! I was looking for a stone!’ Sky answered, shaking her slingshot at Luna.  
‘I wouldn’t ever leave you behind! Never, ever!’

Luna just wheezed in response, and tried desperately to catch her breath.

And then, there was a quiet *chu-chunk* that caught the ear of both girls, and they turned to see a man —clad in filthy white doctor’s coat— standing in the trees. Behind him came the light of an open door, though the girls couldn’t see the building through the thick shrubbery.

No. All they saw was the man.

The man, and the gun in his hands.

Luna gave a gasp, skittering backwards as Sky stumbled to stand over her protectively, and in a stammering voice Sky asked the man:

‘Wh-Who are you? A-Are you a h-hunter? Can you— Do you know h-how to get home? We’re l-lost.’

The man lowered his gun, slowly, and Luna saw his eyes, now; with their deep exhausted bags so purple and bruised. He looked like he hadn’t slept in days.

‘You’re lost, hm?’ he said, slowly.

Sky nodded. ‘W-We need to get b-back to town.’

‘Why don’t you come inside?’ he asked, motioning to the light behind him. ‘I can get you something warm to drink. Do you like... hot chocolate?’

Sky and Luna shared a glance, before Sky took a step back.

‘W-We’re not a-allowed to go in st-strangers h-houses,’ she said, swallowing as she did.

The man took a step forward. ‘I think you should come inside.’

Luna let out a fearful cry, scrabbling backwards in the dirt as Sky’s eyes filled with tears and she put out an arm to block him from her sister.

Her tone was tearful as she spoke, in a voice so quiet it was almost a whisper, ‘*Please. We just want to go home.*’

The man raised his gun, then, aiming it at the girls. And he took a deep breath, steadying his shaking hands as he stared the girls down.

Tears welled in Sky’s eyes, as she shook from head-to-toe. ‘*Please.*’

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Heart That Loves Deeply sat bolt upright in bed; the sound of a loud *BANG!* and the screeching of frightened birds in the woods tugging her from her dreams with a sudden, bone-chilling horror.

She clambered over her husband, all but falling out of their shared bed in her desperation to rush into the hall.

‘Heart?’ the sleepy voice of her husband called after her. ‘Heart, what’s wrong?’

She ignored him, hurrying into the nursery and pulling back the bedsheets to both her daughters’ beds.

The awful, heavy feeling in her chest sunk all the way to her gut as she stared at the empty beds.

And as she fell to her knees, the sound of a second gunshot echoed through the night.

—END—

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