

Through the Cellar Door

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By : mkkrinler

It's hard to say where it came from. Where do any of them come from? But it came to Pauls backyard, then moved into cellar through it's big red door.



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Paul had never given much thought about where monsters came from. He had watched silly cartoons with monsters in them before. Cartoons Paul had watched always depicted monsters as friendly things, not actually wanting to scare children, and when all was said and done, they were cute and cuddly. Those cartoons were always good at making sure there was a happy ending.

The 7-year-old boy never thought that hard about it, but in the subconscious of his young mind such thoughts existed. The truth was always clear to him: monsters are not friendly at all. They live alone, in dirty, smelly, dark places and were never, ever, to be cuddled.

Nightmares often woke Paul in the middle of the night. He always woke sweaty and in a panic from the dreams, though he was never able to remember them, for which he was quite grateful. This particular night, he sat up in bed, not feeling particularly tired despite how dark it was outside and in his small room. The toys on his shelf made large looming shadows against the wall. Paul did not much like the dark either and decided to ignore the shadows on his wall.

Monsters were Paul's biggest fear. Spiders too, though he considered them to be little monsters. There was always a small sense of triumph and victory when ever he got to squish a spider under his shoe.

He yawned and stretched and scratched his thick black head of hair. He was starting to calm down from his nightmare, wanting to go back to sleep when he finally noticed that Ruger, his daddy's dog, was barking in the back yard. He also noticed the reason for the toy shadows was that the back porch motion light was on.

Ruger was daddy's old German shepherd. The dog was really old; Ruger had been part of the family before he had been born yet, or so Paul was told. He was a big lean dog with a white muzzle, and sometimes he growled at Paul, which was also scary. Paul had been told that German Shepherds are a little mean, and Ruger was a little mean, but most of the time he let Paul pet him nicely, and that made him a good dog.

Ruger barked like this every now and then, when ever something wandered out of the woods and into their back yard. His daddy had also told him the dog was very protective and did not like strangers. Paul got up from bed and quickly crossed the room, pressing his nose and both hands against the window. Ruger had turned on the motion light because he was barking into the large, dark back yard, beyond where the light reached. Paul had seen him kill little animals like possums and rabbits that came into the backyard. He watched eagerly, to see if something would be caught.

It must have been a big opossum, because Ruger was barking harder than Paul knew he was able. He was on his hind legs, pulling at the chain leash that locked him to the back porch by his collar. He was fighting the chain and snarling and snapping at the dark. Paul was more curious than afraid, after all, Ruger did protect them, and he certainly seemed scary enough right now.

The little boy saw a faint movement near his dad's work shop across from the cellar in the backyard. It was hard to spot because it was a black shadow deep in a black yard but he could see it moving. It moved confidently as if it were not afraid of Ruger at all. At first Paul was afraid because he imagined it was a black bear. It was long and walked on all fours like a bear would, but it was much too skinny, and its legs too long.

Through the Cellar Door

He then thought it was large cat, like a cougar because it crept across the yard a lot like a stalking cat would with its head down low.

It became hard to breath, and the hairs on the back of Paul's neck tingled. It was not a bear or a cat of any kind. The shadow was circling the illuminated space of the backyard where the vicious dog barked with all his might. The animal, no, monster, almost looked like it was shaped like a man but with oily black leather for skin; walking on his hands and feet, with an arched back. But the elbows and knees were all backwards like an animal, and its head was shaped more like a foot ball than a soccer ball. In the shadow of the backyard porchlight reflected against narrow slate black eyes, like a coyotes would in a cars headlights. The arms and legs were thin like gnarled branches. It had hands where feet should be, and all four were enormous, with long menacing fingers and thumbs.

Ruger suddenly dropped to all fours and whimpered once, but he did not back away from the approaching monster. It came towards the light slowly, its mouth now slack showing rows of razor teeth. Paul ran out of his room as Ruger's savage barking started again. He ran down the hall, and into his parents room with his heart in his mouth. He shouted and shook his mommy with both hands dancing nervously from one foot to the other. His mommy sat up and put her hands on his face making shushing sounds.

"There's a monster in the backyard mommy and Ruger is back there and it wants to eat Ruger and Ruger is too mean to run and hide and the monster is going to eat him mommy and daddy has to stop it from eating Ruger..." Paul had run out of breath and stopped his stream of panicked chatter, taking in a deep gulp of air.

"Baby, baby, it's okay." his mommy said.

Paul made a whining noise at not being listened to. He hated being called 'baby', but that was not important right now. "It's no okay, it's dark out and monsters are strongest and meanest in the dark!" She was starting to say something about a nightmare but Paul ran around to the other side of the bed and gave his daddy a good shake. He was already awake but finally sat up, gently taking Paul by his shoulders.

"Paul, buddy, everything is fine." he said in his groggy, but always steady and reassuring voice. Paul felt his strong arms pick him up onto the bed where he sat on his daddy's knee. "Listen." he said. Paul did listen, even though he felt like he had to tell his daddy everything he had just told mommy, he stayed quiet. Then he realized he could not hear anything. "See? Ruger scared it away, whatever it was" daddy said calmly.

Paul wanted to argue but his mommy had come around and picked him up off the bed in her arms. "Ruger is a scary dog. I'm sure he scared away whatever it was." she said as they walked back to his room. She set Paul down on the floor and he ran to his window again. The motion light had turned back off plunging the backyard into a deep darkness. And Ruger was not barking.

"See? He went back to bed too. Hop in, sweetie." His mommy said in a tired voice as she patted the side of the bed with one hand.

She tucked him in, and kissed his cheeks. He lay very still for a long time listening, but there were no sounds at all now. He looked at his dark window, waiting to see if the light would turn back on. He then looked at his wall, and the toys themselves were now dark, threatening shadows in his room. The scared little boy could do

Through the Cellar Door

nothing about it in the dark and he slowly pulled his bed sheets up over his head to hide and fall back to sleep.

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The next morning was the usual flurry of hurrying about before going to school. Paul was ushered into the shower; his clothes were laid out for him and he sat down to eat breakfast. He was very nearly about to accept that the monster had been a nightmare until he heard his parents talking in the kitchen while he ate his french toast.

"How the hell could he have snapped the chain? It wasn't a ring bent out of place, it was snapped."

"It wasn't the strongest of chains I suppose, if he really pulled on it to go chase something. He is a strong dog."

Paul rode the school bus that morning with his french toast sitting heavy and icky in his stomach. It seemed a monster had moved out its creepy dark place in the woods, and had picked their house for its new home.

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Two days went by with no sign of Ruger; despite the desperate search by Paul's parents. Paul did not try to tell them that they would do better looking out in the woods; rather than at the pound or animal rescue places that were always full of angry cats. Parents never listen, especially when it was important.

Seven-year-olds can be afraid of a lot of things. Fears can range from monsters and spiders to things like the dark and being told to hug a strange uncle. One thing seven-year-olds do not usually find frightening is the concept of dying. Paul's young mind could visualize being caught and eaten by a monster, but not that he would die and cease to exist. This made the fear of being caught and eaten in the dark very frightening, but there was no fear that he would actually die and be no more.

There are some things Paul knew to be true. Monsters are scary and they are certain to catch you and eat you in the night. However, it is common knowledge that they absolutely hate day light and that is why they hide during the day. That is why you hide under your blankets at night and is also why you never see them under your bed during the day.

Paul also felt positive that a monster could be killed by someone brave; this is usually not done with their hands. Monsters are slain with big swords and round shields and helmets with feathers coming out of them. His toy knights were often slaying evil creatures on his bed room floor.

Paul did not have a sword or a flashy metal helmet. What he did have was a birthday present from his father: a bright red Swiss Army Knife. While his mother had told him constantly how dangerous it was and how careful he should be; he knew it was not enough to slay a monster that ate mean dogs. What it could do for him though, is help build a wooden spear. He and his friend Felix played swords all the time with branches and he knew quite well you could really hurt someone with a good swing or poke.

With this knowledge Paul struck out into the woods right after school to play. He only explained to his mother he was going to "Monster hunting". He stepped into the trees while the sun was still high in the sky. His first mission was to search through the fallen branches and test them against the tall weeds and short skinny trees. The right spear needed to be skinny enough that he could get a good grip on it and light enough that he could swing it, but not so skinny it would not hurt, or break when he hit something.

Through the Cellar Door

The dense woods offered a lot of choices. He found a perfect branch before too long and quickly put his little knife to work sitting on a large smooth rock. He clumsily peeled off all of the bark and sawed at the knobs to make it smooth and comfortable for holding. He then set to work on the tip. At first he made it too pointy and it snapped when he tested it against a tree. The second time he made the sharp point broader and further down into the shaft so that when he swung it at branches and small trees, it did not break.

Much of the afternoon was spent this way, poking at the shadows and looking under fallen logs. He also spent a long time fighting off imaginary monsters with his new weapon. He wacked and stabbed at several things as he hiked through wooded area around his house.

He was a little sad, but not all surprised that he found no sign of Ruger. The monster probably lived in a cave somewhere, dark and icky, and had eaten the family pet there. The thought made him shudder; then he noticed that the shadows on the trees were growing pretty long. He got in trouble if he stayed in the woods when it got dark. More importantly, he was certain a monster lived nearby. The last thing he wanted was to be alone in the dark with the dog eater.

He jogged through the woods with his new trusted weapon in one hand, trying to outrun the setting sun. More than once on his journey home he believed he heard a rustling behind him. He jogged faster, seeing the house through the thinner trees. When he heard a branch snap loudly behind him, he sprinted as fast as he could out of the shadows of the woods and into the safety of his back yard, up the steps and rushed through the back door. He shut the door quickly and let out a long breath.

After a short explanation with his mommy and daddy about how the spear was important for hunting monsters, his mother resigned to let him keep it, if it was left in the coat closet...for now! His dad only winked at him and encouraged him to slay them all.

Paul shuddered at the thought of there being more than one.

That night Paul woke again with a loud gasp; sweat trickling down his back. He was not sure what woke him, but his heart was thumping. Surely it was not Ruger barking. Despite how dark it was he crawled out of bed and walked over to the window. If Ruger was still alive he would have warned everyone when a monster was coming. But their guard dog had been eaten by a monster. His mommy and daddy did not believe in monsters and he knew it was up to him to save everyone.

An odd thought came to him as he looked into the backyard. His daddy had told him that someday he would be a man. He knew he was only a boy but slaying monsters sounded like something a man would do. Like slaying a dragon. He stood by the window for a while, reveling in the idea of his father being impressed with him killing the scary monster, when he saw the same dark shape moving through the back yard.

He crouched suddenly at his window and peeked over the window sill. "It followed me home!" he thought with a sense of dread. He crouched, peeking at the monster moving with its lithe, oily black body. Its abnormal head came into view. Paul could now see that the creature also had a long lizard-like tail. He held his breath as it stopped in the middle of the yard and seemed to sniff the abandoned chain that had once held their night protector. The monster seemed to pace around the backyard, as if it was sniffing the ground. It lifted its head and saw the large red cellar door. It moved quickly across the yard and paused at the large doors. It looked around then pulled open one of the doors with its massive hands and slinked in with a loud slam as the heavy door collapsed back into itself.

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Through the Cellar Door

Paul crawled into his parents bed that night. Normally they would not have allowed it, but it was a Friday night and he did not have to go to school in the morning. He even tried to mumble again that there was still a monster, but they were both fast asleep. Even in the protected area between his mommy and daddy, he had trouble falling back to sleep in their dark room. When he finally did fall asleep, he dreamed more of monsters in the night.

The next morning daddy left on errands right away. His mommy cooked him breakfast then told him to go outside and play because, "It's far too nice outside to stay in all day."

He spent a long time staring at the large red cellar doors, concentrating hard on what to do. The cellar was not attached to the house. Daddy had once said it used to be a bomb shelter for the Cold War when we used to be afraid bad guys would bomb us. He was not sure what all that meant or exactly why someone would want to bomb their house. What he did know was that there was a monster down there, hiding, curled up in a dark corner, maybe.

He also knew there were no windows, so the only sunlight would come through the doors if he left them open. There was a light bulb in there too, but the string to turn it on was too high for him to reach. While the cellar was not exactly "off limits", he was not supposed to play down there. It was where daddy kept his tools and machines.

Paul turned and marched back into the house with the vivid image of his proud father congratulating him on being so brave. He needed the best armor he could find, he thought as he walked into the house toward the coat closet. He decided on his brown boots, for walking in the woods and a long sleeve white shirt under his overalls.

His mommy was scrubbing at the dishes from breakfast as he walked through the kitchen. "What are you playing at hun?"

As he clopped past her in his heavy boots, spear in hand, he told her the truth, "I'm gonna kill a monster."

Once again he stood facing the cellar and gripped the spear tightly in both hands. He knew he had to be the man of the house and slay the monster. He took hold of the warm brass handle gleaming in the sunlight and gave it a hard pull. The door opened slowly, upward and outward as he strained to lift it. Finally it fell open to the backyard, pouring light down the concrete stairs.

He took the first two steps slowly, peering down into the half lit cellar. There were only a few steep steps and the morning light washed the smooth concrete floor at the bottom, working to illuminate the far shelves, packed full with cans of paint and other grown-up things. He continued down the last few steps; ready for battle with both hands on his spear. His eyes darted from shadow to shadow, his heart pounding in his temples. He reached the floor at last and wiped each of his sweaty hands on his overalls.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are." He muttered, more to himself than any monster who might be listening. As soon as the challenge left his mouth he heard a rustling in the corner of the cavern. As if crawling out of the shadow itself, the unnatural dog eater appeared and crept towards him. Its coal eyes were narrowed slits, black with no pupil and full of murderous intent. The long jaw opened and a lizard like hiss came out, grating on Paul's ears.

Paul turned suddenly to face the monster, his spear leveled and aimed at the creature. It took a few steps forward, moving to circle the young boy but keeping out of direct sunlight. Paul had a feeling he must look plump and juicy by the way drool was dripping from its jaw to the floor. He fought the urge to run and call for

Through the Cellar Door

his mommy.

Paul sidestepped to continue facing it, carefully staying in the sunlight spilling in from the open doors. They faced each other like this for a moment before the monster's lips pulled back, baring its fanged, shark-like teeth at Paul as the long tail whipped from side to side. Paul took a quick step forward and swung the spear like he would a baseball bat with a loud yell. The monster shrunk back raising a leg in defense. The loud thwack of the stick told Paul it had to have hurt, and the stick vibrated in his hand as the monster retreated back a couple of steps deeper into the shade of the cellar.

Paul stabbed out with the point of the spear a few times but the creature kept its distance, hissing loudly now. "You can't fool me like that!" Paul said, keeping his feet planted firmly on the ground, staying full in the light. "I've come to kill you, monster! You don't just get to eat my family!" he yelled in his high, young voice.

The creature gave a bark-like roar as if in response and sprang at Paul. He gave a high-pitched yell at the attack and jumped to the side. Suddenly their places had reversed, Paul in the dark and the monster illuminated in the light. It growled and vibrated, as if weakened in the sunlight. "Take this!" Paul shouted, taking the initiative with an overhand swing. He smacked the monster several times, as if it were his friend Felix in the woods. Except now Paul was swinging as hard as he could. They danced around each other, Paul repeatedly swinging for the monster's large, clawed hands. It growled and yipped as its hands were struck back, each time it made to swing at Paul.

He raised the spear above his head with both hands when the monster quickly moved to the side and twisted. Its heavy tail whistled through the air and struck Paul in the chest with surprising force. He staggered back a several steps before tripping over his stumbling feet landing on his back with a hard thud. The monster came at him immediately, Paul only kept it off with some well-placed jabs of the pointed end of his spear and his kicking feet. The monster roared and kept pushing forward as he stabbed and scuttled jabbing back. Finally with a large hand, the monster caught Paul's spear, flinging it away. Paul screamed, now in the shadows and without his weapon. He scrambled to his feet as his spear hit the far wall of the cellar only to quickly duck just in time as the beast launched over him in a pounce.

With a loud crash the black thing collided into the shelf against the wall making a loud rucus. Paul ran up to the heavy metal shelf and with all of his strength and weight pulled it off balance so it came crashing down on the creature. The monster howled and kicked under the pounding weight of the shelf as paint cans rolled and a gas can spilled all over the floor. Paul did not hesitate. He picked up a heavy paint can and with both hands pelted the monster with the heavy metal can. The creature shrieked and hissed in pain, making Paul step back nervously. As it began to wriggle out from under the shelf Paul ran for his spear and jumped into the light once more, facing the beast. He saw the creature struggling to pull its long tail out from the pinning shelf and took the opportunity to drive the spear forward through oily skin between the beast's ribs.

The monster thrashed and wailed as Paul pulled the spear back to himself in a defensive stance. Thick dark blood smeared the floor under the monster as it backed away from Paul, now afraid. It snapped its teeth at him violently and again swung its wicked tail at him. Paul was quick to its game and parried away its tail with the shaft of the spear. He stepped forward and gave its growling head a good kick, as if it really were a football. It jerked to the side and swung a hand at him again. Paul felt one of the straps of his overalls snap, as he barely leaned back out of the way of its claws.

The monster needed to die, now. Again he raised the spear above his head, but this time with the shaft pointing down. With all of his might he thrust the spear down and into the monster's back. It laid flat on the ground yowling and squawking in pain. Paul pushed his weight into the spear, driving it deeper, hoping he had stabbed it in the heart. His feet slipped on the slick floor and he lost his grip of the spear sticking straight

Through the Cellar Door

up out of the monster. He rolled away quickly, staining his clothes with blood and gasoline, but he did not care.

The monster lay on its belly and was trying with all four limbs to pull the spear lodged in its back. It looked to Paul just like a spider he had stabbed with his Swiss army knife once. In the distance he could hear something outside, the sound of daddy's car door opening and closing. He had to be quick. He looked around, for another weapon, like another paint can. His eyes then fell on the long wood handle of the chopping axe. He ran to it and grabbed his new heavy weapon with both hands.

Paul he heard his father call out from the backyard. Paul did not have time to reply. He dragged the heavy wood and iron axe nearer to the monster, still squirming and howling on the concrete. The metal blade scraped along the concrete as he dragged it, "Paul what's going on down there?" came a concerned voice again.

There was a big nasty mess on the floor, but he did not think that would matter so much when it was over. Paul put his shoulder under the shaft of the axe and was able to lift it off the ground with his legs. Then, with all of his strength, using his shoulder as a pivot, Paul pulled the axe for the coup-de-gras, though Paul had no idea what that really meant. The weight of the axe helped to bring it down hard, and fast. It lodged deep into the horrible monster's neck, nearly chopping off its weird head with a foaming mouth and hateful eyes.

He tried to pull on the axe for a second swing, but it was lodged tight, and instead Paul slipped again, as more inky blood spread across the concrete and around his small feet. The creature thrashing began to slow, its arms flailing less and less, as its big eyes stared long and angrily into Paul's. It knew it had been defeated.

The 7-year-old boy took a deep breath and slowly released it, feeling a little nauseated. That had not been anything like slaying a monster ought to have been. He did not feel all too triumphant at that moment. It had been gross, and dangerous. Like stepping on a spider barefoot that is so big, you can hear it crunch as you squish it.

A sudden shadow cast over the remaining light of the cellar. Paul looked up to see the silhouette of his dad at the top of the stairs. A jumble of words sat in Paul's mouth as he tried to think of a way to explain. To express how everything was going to be okay now. About how brave he had been in his quest to slay a monster and be a "Man of the House". He heard his father's whispered words,

Oh my God!

Through the Cellar Door

Through the Cellar Door

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