

Dust and Demons

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Monsters aren't real. That's what I was taught. That's what was true. But now I know those myths and legends that scared children for years had to come from somewhere.

It was a quiet night in Riverside, California. A few stars were twinkling in the air. The white crescent moon was showering the night sky with its iridescent glow. It was 12:00 pm. My sore eyes were sagging down to my feet. I somehow managed to get across my room to my comfy, yellow bed. I slowly collapsed onto the fluffy sheets, not even trying to get myself underneath the warm, welcoming covers. My eyes slowly awakened from my soothing state of slumber. I looked across the room to my clock, and the time read: 12:24. Since I was already awake and didn't want to ruin my very austere schedule, I decided it would be best if I picked out my outfit for the next day.

I always loved to keep a schedule for everything I had to do each day. It helped me manage my time well, and it's been working great for five years.

I dragged my feet to my closet door. My shoulders were slumped, and my back was hunched. I slowly opened the door and ambled into the dark, tiny room. I didn't have the energy to turn on the lights, but I've been there 1,000 times. I knew I was able to navigate my own closet in the dark. I slowly strolled to the opposite side of my closet, where my shirts were. As I was walking over, I suddenly tripped on an old shoe box. Before I could catch myself, I suddenly fell right into my wall. It was mostly a daze, but I remember gravitating towards it. It came closer and closer to my face. I expected to black out. I expected to get a concussion. I even expected to fall straight through the dry wood. However, I never expected what would come next.

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I slowly woke up. I knew I wasn't in my closet, but I didn't recognize the area I seemed to be in. I thought it was just a dream and didn't think anything of it. I then saw three black, ghostly figures

towering over me as I slowly awakened from my dizzy haze. They had sharp yellow-white teeth and burning small, red eyes. They were made up of a black, translucent substance.

Amongst them were two human-like creatures. They looked very similar to the monsters, yet different. One of them had deep, forest green eyes. When she stared at me, it was like she was feeding onto my greed, my power. I didn't even know I had those thoughts in me, but when she was next to me, it was like her emotions transferred onto me. She wore a tight black turtle neck with a dark green skirt.

The other human standing amidst the monsters had ocean blue eyes. He wore pitch black trousers with a deep blue shirt. He fed onto my sadness and sorrow. He was the same as the girl; every time he stared into my eyes or came near me, my emotions of sadness would rise.

“What should we do with her?” he said in a scratchy, menacing tone.

“I don't know?” a shadow monster eerily responded. “We should probably take her to the royal palace.”

The two picked me up by my arms. They slowly dragged me across the rocky floor. The girl and two other shadow monsters followed closely behind. I was still woozy, so I couldn't fight back. But even if I tried, I couldn't take on one of them, let alone all five.

It had to be at least ten minutes before we arrived at the palace. My vision was all blurry, and I wasn't fully functioning, but I remember the grand, luxurious castle I was brought in front of. I looked up at the thunderous clouds that lay closely above and took in all the beauty it held. It had dark brown cobblestones piling brick by brick until it reached 200 feet in the air. As I looked up, it towered over me with a menacing grin. Waiting for me to enter its mischievous halls. Welcoming me into its arms of darkness.

The guard standing in front of the large, spiky gate separating the palace from the rest of the dark and sinister world apathetically said, “State your business, peasants.”

I let out a little giggle, but I don't think he heard me. He had such a funny, accented voice, so I couldn't help but laugh a little.

“We have a guest for the king,” the girl said promptly. “We found her lying at one of our portal sights. Clearly a human.”

“You may pass.”

The large gate slowly opened, and the five monsters walked me into the castle. We were greeted by a grand, opulent hallway. From top to bottom, there were portraits that filled the walls. Some were small, and some took up an entire section of the wall. I stared in awe at the beautiful pictures that gleamed beside me. Every one with a different personality. Every one with a different perspective.

We finally entered an exquisite ballroom. A crystal chandelier the size of my closet was hanging from the beautiful array of paintings that flew across the ceiling. I looked around, and it was utterly breathtaking. The floor was made of the most beautiful glowing, beige tiles, and towards the back, there were three huge dark purple velvet chairs.

As I was kneeling on the glistening floor, two of the monsters still held my arms up, as I was still very disoriented from my unprecedented fall. Then in walked the royal family. The king entered first. He was a huge man. He wore an exquisite gold crown with colorful gems indented all across the equator. Next entered the queen. She wore a glamorous light purple velvet dress with the most beautiful silver pattern embroidered across the gown. Then their daughter entered. She wore a dark purple long sleeve shirt with a purple dress over it. She had glistening brown hair, which covered some of her eyes.

They all sat down on their glamorous chairs in their glamorous ballroom and stared straight at me with emotionless faces. When they stared directly into my eyes, all I felt were the demons inside me. The greed. The rage. The envy. Every part of me that was corrupted.

“What is the reason for this visit?” the king harshly stated to the monsters.

“We found her,” the girl pushed me to the ground, so my face was now kissing the floor. “She was lying on the floor next to the portals.”

“Leave us.”

My dizziness from the fall was slowly wearing off, so I could stand up on my own; I was still a little wobbly, though.

“You’re a human? Yes?” the king asked. Although it felt more like a statement to me.

“Y-es. I am,” I quivered as I responded. Fear was traveling across my body faster than soundwaves could travel in a room. “I was just trying to-”

“SILENCE! Guards! Take her.”

“Wait! Wait! Can I please just explain!”

The guards picked me up by my arms and began to drag me to the dungeons. I was panicking. I kicked my feet and pleaded for the royal family to hear me out, but it was no use. I didn’t know what they would do to me or if they would do anything. However, I knew that being taken by guards in a mysterious palace to a dungeon wasn’t good.

I spent the last hour trying to break open the cell I layed in, but it was no use. I tried talking to the guards, yet they refused to respond; their faces stayed impassive. I finally gave up and just sat on the dusty, rough floor, waiting for fate to present itself to me. I saw a shallow, small puddle in front of me, and I began tearing up. My short, red hair reminded me of when my friends and I all changed our hair for the first day of junior year. The black mesh sweater I wore reminded me of my 15th birthday when I first got it. Everything I was wearing. Everything I saw when I looked at my reflection. Everything reminded me of my family. My friends. And I started to cry even more.

Sitting down and staring at the wall, I wondered what was going on in my life back home. I wondered what my family thought when they woke up, or if they even woke up yet, and didn’t see me snug in my bed. I wondered what my friends thought if school had already started and they didn’t see me in class; I never missed a day of school, even when I was sick. There wasn’t exactly anything I could do to help ease the worry they felt or would feel. However, I was going to do one thing...get out, no matter how long it would take or how risky it would be. I was determined to get back to my family.

After another 30 minutes of plotting my escape, the princess walked into the dungeon. I figured she was coming to get me for whatever they were planning to do to me next, so my fictional plan soon became a reality. I didn’t think I could fight her off or even delay her a little so I could escape, but I had to try.

She took the elegant gold key out of her back pocket and put it into the jail cell. After she opened the barred door, she firmly said, “Get up and let’s go.”

I slowly got up, careful about what my following movements would be. She guided her arms,, motioning me to get in front of her. As she closed the door, I turned around and pushed her right into the metal door as hard as I could. Then, I sprinted towards the door. The guards were waiting outside the door due to the princess’s orders, so I knew eventually I would have to fight them. But for now, I was focused on running for my life.

As I ran, I suddenly felt a tremendous force push me down, dragging me further and further from my freedom. I was scraping at the floor. Trying to claw my way out of whatever brutal force lay upon me. I found myself turned around, staring directly at the princess. She lifted me up, held me against the wall, and said, “You have two choices: You can die or escape. Which one do you want?”

“Wait, so you’re not gonna kill me?” I timidly asked.

“No.”

“So...why are you here?”

She sighed, “I’m trying to help you.”

“But why?”

“Just...because. Okay! Don’t ask questions,” she seemed very frustrated.

I didn’t want to risk dying, so I did what she said. I knew there was a possibility it could be a trap, but either way, it was a lose-lose situation for me. I either go with her and risk it being a trap and die. Or I could stay in that tiny cell even longer, but that would just delay the inevitable.

“Fine.”

I walked with her down the hallway and up the stairs. Instead of going to the grand ballroom or to his parents, we went to this secret room. I was filled with anxiety. All the things that could possibly happen, I thought of. All the things that could potentially go wrong, I contemplated. We finally arrived back in the hallway filled with those extraordinary family portraits. She went to a picture a foot higher than me, about six feet tall and four feet wide. She slowly opened it up and told me, “Go.”

“A lady of very few words, I see,” I nervously snickered.

I walked into the dark hallway behind the portrait and continued to amble down the stairs. I soon found myself in front of a locked wooden door. The princess shoved me aside, got another key from her pocket, and put it into the lock. After she opened it and I stepped inside, I had an immediate look of amazement on my face. “What is this place,” I stared in awe as I asked her.

“My secret room,” she responded. “This is where I keep all my secret stuff: spell books, potions, and what you need to escape this world.”

She walked over to a locked glass cabinet across the room. She brought out *another* key, and I thought, “Where in the world does she have that much room on her to fit three, quite sizeable, keys?!”

“Here,” she said and gave me a colorful, small orb. “This will get you back to the human world.”

“I don’t understand,” I questioned.

She rolled her eyes, “What do you not understand, Red?”

“First off, it’s Audrina. Secondly, why can’t I just return to my world the same way I came to yours?”

“Because if you go that way, the same effect will happen to you as it happens to the monsters. One: you are going to have a ghost-like appearance. Two: you will only be able to come out a night. Three: people will only be able to see you at night.”

“Oh, okay. But why do you *want* me to escape? You don’t seem so thrilled to help me.”

“Because I don’t want what happened to the others to happen to you.” her voice started to crack, and her eyes began to water a bit. I could tell she was trying her best not to show it in front of me.

“What happened?” I said, a bit afraid of the answer to come.

“The humans who brought you here. Remember them?”

“Yeah.”

“They used to be like you. They had lives in the human world just like you. But one night, they accidentally stumbled onto our kingdom here. They were brought to the palace, and my father gave them a fate worse than death.”

I stared at her with fear in my eyes, waiting for an answer.

“He used his powers to take their soul. To forget their memories. To forget their past lives. He turned them into demons.”

“Oh,” I muttered.

“I had to watch as he did all that, and I can’t go through that again. Watching their life slip away before them in agony,” she sniffled and wiped a single tear coming down her face.

“I-I’m sorry. You know that you had to go through that.”

“Not your fault,” she returned to that stern, emotionless tone. “But anyways, there’s a specific way to use this.”

I was surprised on how quickly she could change her emotions. One minute she was all sad about “the fate worse than death,” but the next minute, she went on talking like nothing ever happened.

“What If I don’t use it correctly? Will it cause the destruction of humanity?” I chuckled.

She just stared at me and said, “Yes. Yes, it will.”

I felt a little embarrassed, and my face started to turn red.

“You must take this orb and smash it. I suggest using your foot to smash it because if you throw it down, the dust will get everywhere, making it harder to pick up. Then you must pick up every single dust speck. It shouldn’t be that hard to see because they will sparkle. And this is the *most* important part. Make sure to pick up every last speck of dust. Then you *must* burn it. Don’t throw it away. Don’t rinse it down the sink. You have to burn it. If you don’t, then all the monsters and demons here will be able to infiltrate the human world. Not as ghosts or spirits; they will be able to make contact with humans. If that happens, your entire world is destined for doom.”

“So, no pressure,” I laughed.

“This is not a joke.”

“Right.”

“Go to the portal area to do it. That way the monsters and demons will just think of it as another portal. But still be very discrete about it.”

“Okay, well, thanks. For saving me from a fate worse than death,” I chuckled.

She smiled back and said, “Anytime.”

I went in to give her a hug when she asked, “What’s that smell. It’s unlike anything I’ve ever smelled in my life.”

“What smell?”

“Your breath.”

“Oh, it’s sour patch, a type of candy. It’s my favorite when I have to stay up late studying. Have you really never had any?”

“We don’t exactly do *candy* down here. But, it sounds good.”

“It really is,” I laughed

She guided me out of the royal castle to the portals. We were getting a lot of stares, but I was with the princess, and no one dared to question the princess of monsters and demons. “Well, I guess this is goodbye,” she said. “Try not to wander into my kingdom again.”

I chuckled, “I won’t. But what are you gonna tell your dad when he sees me not in my cell.”

“I’ll figure that out when I get there.”

“Well, who knew a princess of something so evil had such a sweet spot.”

She chuckled a little and said, “I would hate to see another person lose their past life just because of a stupid mistake.”

As the princess advised, I went to a shadowed area, so no monsters or demons would follow me. She stood by just as an extra guard. I crushed the orb with my foot and picked the excess specks stuck to the bottom. I walked into the portal leading back to my closet. I then picked up every last sparkle I saw. I was about to step forward but then turned around to the princess. She was watching me as I walked back into my room. I gave a tiny smile and a salutation, then I turned around and continued on my way. I glanced back for a second expecting to see her, but she disappeared into the dark, magical kingdom.

I entered my room and grabbed the lighter I kept on my nightstand, next to my candle. I put all the glittery specks of dust into my candle and then lit the three wicks. I watched till they all burned, and

then went back into my closet to ensure the portal closed. After it did, I went back to bed, surprised to see that only a few hours had passed. It was five in the morning, but I didn't have to be up until six, so I decided to take a quick one-hour nap.

The next day I went to school. I hung out with my friends. Ate breakfast with my family. Everything was normal. I didn't want to tell anybody about my unique experience last night because I figured no one would believe me. Plus, I didn't want anybody to try and travel to that kingdom, knowing what they would do to you.

I was chilling in my bedroom after school, around 4:30 pm. I was doing my homework just like any other day. I was so distracted that I completely forgot about the little adventure I had the night before. When all of a sudden, I see a light coming from the reflection of my computer. I turned around to see my closet glowing. I slowly got my pencil, the closest thing I had that could be used as a weapon, and I slowly made my way to my closet door. I opened it up, and as soon as I saw a shadowy figure, I lifted it up and I was about to throw it, but stopped just in time.

“Wait! Wait! It's just me,” the princess replied.

“Oh,” I let out a side of relief. “What are you doing here.”

She quickly walked out of my closet door and pushed me aside to my bedside table. She grabbed my lighter, put her dust specks in the candle, and watched every sparkle dissolve into the light.

“Um, okay. Welcome to the human world, I guess.”

She was extremely irritated.

“So, what brings you to my neck of the woods.”

“Really,” she said bitterly. “‘What brings you to my neck of the woods.’ Do you have any idea what you have done?!”

“Um...no.”

“Wow. Just wow. I didn't realize humans could be so stupid. It really astonishes me how clueless people are.”

“Well, are you gonna tell me why your mad, or are you just going to keep complaining about how stupid you think humans are.”

“I gave you detailed instructions on how to close the portal right. Cause I’m pretty sure I did.”

“Yeah, you did.”

“Really. Then explain why almost every monster was gone when I woke up. Then I go back to the portals and guess what I see.” She cupped her hands over her mouth, leaned close to my face, and shouted, “Your. Portal. Was. Still. Open.”

“Wait. N-no, that ca-can’t-”

“Uh-u-uh-ya. It happened.” She rolled his eyes.

“Well, no portal is there anymore. I checked. Plus, I don’t see anyone now either.”

“Because you probably didn’t burn it all. There was probably a speck in the candle that you missed because I checked, and there are no specks on the floor.”

“Well, where are the monsters now?”

“Well where do you think, genius? Out. Causing terror.”

“I don’t see them.”

“OF COURSE YOU DON’T SEE THEM! You live in a secluded area. Why would monsters want to terrorize a secluded area with no people!”

“Well, I’m sorry.” I really didn’t mean it. I didn’t want this to happen. I just wanted to get home to my family.

She sighed and rolled his eyes, “We’ll have to wait until dark to go back.”

I laughed, “I’m not going back there.”

“Listen, Red.” I rolled my eyes. “You are the one who caused this mess. So guess what... you’re gonna come with me to fix this disaster.” She smiled sarcastically.

We waited until around 7:00 pm. I was doing my homework and studying while she looked around my room for any more specks I may have missed.

“Come on, it’s time,” she said.

“Great,” I sarcastically replied, “Going back to the place that started all of this.”

We quickly walked back into my closet and headed through the portal connecting the two worlds. She grabbed my hand, and we started running. I had no idea where; I was just following her, so I breathlessly asked her, “Where are we going.”

“My gosh. How are you so out of breath.”

“I’m not athletic, okay. So where are we going.”

“The wisdom-speaker. She knows everything. I’m hoping she’ll be able to fix *your* mistake.”

I rolled my eyes and scoffed, “Wow, you never forget things, do you? I said, ‘I. Was. Sorry!’”

“Sorry doesn’t fix this mess.”

We finally arrived at a very modest house. It was a tiny box made of stone. It had a cute area on the roof with fairy lights and a shelf with some books. On a nearby table, there lay a few plants and potions.

“I love her house,” I said in amazement. “It looks so cozy.”

“Well, no time for gazing; we have to save your world.”

We walked through the wooden door and were poorly greeted by an old woman. “Hello, Lilith,” she sweetly said, “The last time you were here was five years ago.” She smiled, “Do you remember? You wanted my magical orbs, five of them, if I’m being correct, right?” She was still smiling, “How did that all work out for you.”

“Wow, I already love her,” I said to Lilith. It felt amazing seeing somebody condemn the royal, “all-knowing” princess.

“Listen, Minda, we can converse all about my stupid mistake in buying the orbs,” she quickly glanced at me, “And entrusting a human. But are you gonna help us and use your power to save the world, or will you keep making dangerous potions that cause global destruction?”

“I mean, we do live in Abaddon: Land of Monsters and Demons.”

Lilith rolled her eyes.

I went to Minda and politely explained to her, "Listen, Minda. I'm not from here. I have my own life on Earth. I didn't mean to cause any trouble. I really didn't. I just wanted to go home. So please, I'm begging you. Don't let the entire world suffer for my idiotic mistake. Help us, even though I don't deserve it. Help us for my friends, my family. You can help save the entire world. Please." I whispered to her once more with a sorrowful look on my face, "Please." I waited for her response, hoping she would say yes, and she didn't say anything for at least a minute.

"Fine. I'll do it. Only because I like you," Minda smiled at me. "So there are two ways you can get rid of the monsters. You can somehow manage to get them all into the portals connecting the human world and the monster world. Although, I highly doubt that the monsters would agree to that. However there is another way," she paused

"Well what is it?" Lilith annoyedly asked.

"You're not going to like this."

"It's fine just tell us," she said.

Minda looked down while saying, "The only other way is to kill the king."

"What? No! No, I'm not going to kill my father."

"You have to," Minda replied.

"Bu-but why? Why my dad? What does he even have to do with this?"

"Listen. When a new king is crowned, he becomes spiritually bonded to every monster and demon in this kingdom during the ceremony. That's what gives them the power to travel between worlds. Ordinary monsters and demons can't do that by themselves. Only monsters and demons part of the royal bloodline can do that. Once you kill the king, you'll sever the connection between him and the monsters and demons. That way, they'll all be sucked back into this kingdom and never be able to travel to the human world again, whether from the magical orbs or the already made portals."

The princess quickly pushed me aside and stomped out of the quaint hut. Her jaw was clenched. Her hands were in fists. Her eyes were as narrow as they could be.

“Lilith! Lilith,” I called out. I grabbed her arm and turned him around. Her face was filled with tears, and I felt absolutely horrible. “Would you just talk to me, please? I’m sorry.”

“Fine,” she scoffed. “You want me to talk to you? Huh? This would never have happened if you never came wandering into this world,” She pushed her finger into my chest, “If you hadn’t been so irresponsible in making sure every last speck was burned, I wouldn’t have to kill my father. God! Why did you ever come here?! Why?”

“I-I didn’t wander; I fell in,” I shyly stated.

She rolled her tear-filled eyes, “Here,” she pulled another orb out of his pocket, “Take this. Do exactly what you did last time, but. Make. Sure. You. Burn. Every. Single. Dust speck. Capisce?”

“Um, yeah,” I said.

She turned around and continued on his way to the castle. I was about to say “bye,” but I figured my voice was the last thing she wanted to hear.

I took the ten-minute walk back to the portals. As I was walking through the dark, sinister kingdom, I noticed chunks of dark smoke piling into the town. Then the monsters’ shape started to take form, and before I knew it, every single monster was back in the kingdom. A few tears rolled down my face as I quietly said, “She did it.”

After another two minutes, I arrived at the portals. I went into a corner and put the magical, glowing orb on the ground. Then, I took my foot and stomped on it. I picked out all the little specks caught on the bottom of my foot, then all the sparkles on the floor. I then proceeded to walk into my closet, where everything that just happened seemed to disappear behind me.

I walked downstairs, and my parents ran to me; I almost toppled over. They hugged me so tight that I thought I would die of suffocation. When my parents saw my tears, my mom immediately asked, “Audrina, honey. What’s wrong?”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” I replied.

“Is it because of those monsters,” my dad asked.

“No, no. It’s not that. Well, not really.”

My mom was consoling me as she said, “It’s alright, honey. They’re gone now.”

“That’s the problem,” I whispered under my breath.

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It was a typical night in Riverside, California. It’s been a week since the monsters had vanished from the Earth. Nobody else knew why. Nobody else knew how. They just knew they were gone, and we could finally just live in peace. There were definitely a few places that needed construction. Some of the parks demanded to have more trees to be planted. However, for the most part, things were back as they should.

It was 10:00 pm, and I was sitting at my desk finishing my homework. I decided to go to my closet and pick out my outfit for the next day. That way, I will never have to experience what happened last week. I walked over to the section of my closet that had my shirts. I looked over at my jewelry shelf and saw a box of sour patch. I wondered if I had left it there, but I never remembered bringing one into my closet. I then noticed that behind it was a tiny folded piece of paper. I slowly opened it up and read, “I forgive you :)” I took the sour patch with my face, mouth smiling from ear to ear. I kept the little note on my shelf, picked out my clothes, then walked out the closet door and into my room. I immediately opened the sour patch, then laid down on my bed. I started eating the blue and red ones first; then, with a smile still as big as a crescent moon, I simply said, “Thanks.”