

**DR. SPOOKLY'S
SCHOOL
FOR
MONSTERS**

by Henry Close

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PART I:

BEGINNINGS

Chapter I

Dr. Spookly

Jimmy and his two friends stopped at the edge of the clearing in front of the house. A few rays of light from the setting sun shone through the dense forest behind them, casting strange ominous shadows onto the uncut grass and tall weeds. Behind them, long gray strands of Spanish moss hung from limbs of the gnarled oak trees. The moss moved ever so slightly in rhythm with the dying wind.

"Wow! This really looks spooky," Billy said. He turned to look at the forest behind them to make sure he remembered how to get out of there.

Just as he turned, he heard the mournful sound of an owl, and then another. He shivered just a bit.

Jimmy and Oscar were looking at the house in front of them. It was old. There was no paint on the dark wood, and some of the window panes were broken. One of the shutters had fallen to the ground; others were lopsided, hanging loosely from one hinge. The roof was covered with dead leaves and twigs, with patches of dark green moss here and there.

"Look, there's a light," Oscar whispered, pointing to the left side of the house. "That must mean somebody's in there."

"I guess it does," Jimmy whispered back.

The boys stared at the house in front of them. Then they looked at each other. Jimmy looked at the house again, shrugged his shoulders, and took a step into the clearing. When he did, a rabbit suddenly jumped up in front of them and hopped away. The boys jumped back. When they did, Oscar's face brushed

against a long strand of Spanish moss. He gasped as he jerked his head away. His heart was pounding in his chest.

"Are you sure this is the right place, Jimmy?" he asked, after he had caught his breath.

"I think so. We followed all the directions. What do you think, Billy?"

"I don't know," Billy said. "It sure looks scary."

"Maybe it's supposed to look scary. After all, it is a school for monsters." Jimmy looked all around. Then he pointed up over the door. "There's the sign," he said. "'Dr. Spookly's School for Monsters.'"

"I don't know whether I want to go in there or not," Oscar said. His voice quivered just a little.

"We don't have to stay," Jimmy said. "Let's at least see what's there."

Billy and Oscar nodded. They walked very slowly up to the house, and stopped just in front of the first step.

"What's that noise?" Jimmy whispered suddenly, looking off to his left. The boys all looked in the direction of a slow creaking sound. An old rocking chair was moving slowly back and forth as though guided by some unseen hand.

When they stepped on the porch, the boards creaked and moaned. They seemed to be saying, "Why are you here? Why have you come? Do you not know this is the night of the curse?"

The boys stepped on each board very carefully. They did not want to hear any more frightening noises. But no matter where they stepped, the boards creaked and moaned.

When the boys reached the door, and Jimmy put his hand up to ring the bell, Oscar whispered, "This really does look spooky."

"I know," Jimmy replied. He drew his hand back. "Maybe we could come back tomorrow, when it's not so dark," he said.

At that moment, they heard the latch on the inside of the door, and watched as the heavy door slowly creaked open. Before they could react, they were looking right at a tall old man dressed in a black robe, holding a single candle in his hand. There were streaks of gray in his dark hair, and the shadows from the candle made his long face seem dark and gaunt.

"Good evening, boys," he said, speaking each word slowly, in a raspy low voice. "What can I do for you?"

Billy slipped behind Jimmy and whispered, "I'm scared!"

Jimmy pretended not to hear him. "Dr. Spookly," he said, "we want to learn how to be monsters."

"Hmmm," Dr. Spookly replied, stroking his long pointed chin. "Why do you want to do that?"

"Dr. Spookly, we want to get ready for Halloween. Last year, the other kids scared us so bad we couldn't get to sleep for three nights."

"Yeah," Oscar added, "and we all had bad dreams for a long time."

"Daddy told me that monsters don't get scared," Billy said. "They're too busy scaring other people."

"Besides," Oscar said, "I really want to be able to scare my little sister. She's a pain in the butt."

Dr. Spookly rubbed his chin again. He looked at them intently. "It's hard work you know, learning how to be a monster, and how not to be scared. There are lots of things to learn, and it take a lot of practice."

"We know that," Jimmy said. "But we really do want to learn."

"All right," Dr. Spookly said, "the first thing is to pick out a costume." He motioned for Jimmy to follow him into the dark house. Oscar and Billy looked all around before they followed. They came to a huge dark closet, with a damp musty smell. Dr. Spookly held the candle up and pointed to a row of costumes hanging from a clothes rack.

"What are we supposed to do?" Jimmy whispered.

"Just look through them until you find one that looks really scary to you."

Jimmy stepped into the closet and looked. He touched one of the costumes and immediately jerked his hand back. The costume was cold and slimy. Jimmy touched it again and then felt the shoulder. Nobody noticed that he trembled. He removed it from the rack and handed it to Dr. Spookly.

"I think I like this one. It looks awful scary." He rubbed his hand across the front. "It even feels scary."

"Ah," Dr. Spookly said. "The slimy green monster costume. A very good choice."

"I want one like that," Billy said.

"So do I," Oscar added.

"There's only one costume for each color," Dr. Spookly said. "What about a clammy pink monster costume for you?" He handed one of them to Oscar. "And a scaly orange monster costume for you." He handed the other one to Billy. "Now go try them on and let me have a look."

When the boys returned, wearing their costumes, Dr. Spookly led them to a large mirror. "There," he said, "that's how you are going to look."

"Aaaaaah!" Oscar screamed as he looked into the mirror. "What's that?"

"That's you, Dummy," Billy replied. "You look great!"

Jimmy and Billy inspected themselves in the mirror too. Then they looked at Dr. Spookly.

"Very good," he said. "From now on, whenever you wear these costumes, you are the Slimy Green Monster, and the Clammy Pink Monster, and the Scaly Orange Monster. Now the lessons begin."

Chapter II

The First Lesson

The next night, the boys arrived a bit earlier. The Spanish moss still hung from the trees. The setting sun still made strange shadows on the grass. The boards on the porch still moaned and creaked when the boys walked on them. The boys still shivered a little.

Jimmy hesitated for just a moment before he rang the bell. He heard footsteps in the house, and then the door slowly opened.

"Good evening, boys," Dr. Spookly said. His voice seemed even lower and slower than the night before. "Come right in."

He had the three monster costumes across his arm. "Here are your costumes, and there is the dressing room. Come back here when you have changed."

Dr. Spookly pointed to a dark corner of the room. A skeleton was hanging on the door, holding a board in its hands. The scrawling writing said, "Changing Room."

The boys were back in just a few moments, wearing their monster costumes. "Very good," Dr. Spookly muttered. "Now come with me."

The boys followed Dr. Spookly as he led them through the house, into the back yard, and along a narrow path that led up to the edge of the dense forest.

"All right," Dr. Spookly said, "who wants to be first?"

The boys all looked at each other and shook their heads.

"What about you, Oscar?" Jimmy proposed. "You're the tallest."

Oscar shook his head. "I think Billy should go first. He's the oldest."

"Me?" Billy protested, with his hands against his chest. "I think it should be Jimmy. After all, he's the one who brought us here!"

"Jimmy," Dr. Spookly said, "I think you should go first. You were the first one to say something. That may mean you're very brave."

"It might?" Jimmy swallowed hard, and then nodded his head. "I guess I can go first," he said.

"This path circles through the forest and comes out under that big oak tree. You don't know what kinds of ghosts and monsters will meet you along the path. Your job is to scare them before they scare you."

"You want me to walk down that path all by myself?" Jimmy was staring at the small gap in the underbrush.

"That's right." Dr. Spookly said. "All by yourself."

At that moment, an owl screeched right above his head, and flew away.

Jimmy shuddered. He turned and looked at his friends, and then at Dr. Spookly. "All by myself?"

Dr. Spookly nodded. "That's right. And try very hard not to think about the ghosts and the monsters."

Jimmy took a small step toward the forest and stopped. He turned toward Dr. Spookly and started to say something. Instead, he sighed, turned toward the forest and walked in.

Dr. Spookly motioned for the other boys to follow him. "Here is another path into the forest, a short cut that leads right to the path Jimmy is on. I want one of you to go down this path and scare him."

He looked at Oscar for several seconds, and stroked his black beard. "I think you're the one to do this. Be very quiet until you hear Jimmy coming. Then roar as loudly as you can. We'll be right behind you."

"I can do that," Oscar said. He leaned forward and let his arms dangle in front of him. "I am the Clammy Pink Monster," he said, trying to speak in a deep voice like Dr. Spookly. "I can scare you."

Billy giggled. Oscar turned and looked at him, and frowned. "I am too scary!" he declared.

Dr. Spookly led the two boys down the other path into the forest. They stopped behind a huge oak tree. He motioned for Oscar to go a few feet forward and crouch down behind a tangle of shrubs that Jimmy would have to walk past.

When he heard Jimmy coming, Oscar raised his head to look down the path. Then he cupped his hands around his mouth and said, "roar." But he said it very softly. Billy couldn't even hear it.

Dr. Spookly whispered to him as loud as a whisper can be and still be a whisper, "Louder!" he said. "Louder!"

Oscar took a deep breath and bellowed out as loud as he could, "ROARIIII!"

Jimmy gasped, ran behind a pine tree and put his hands over his ears.

But Oscar didn't see that. When he heard that terrible roar, he jumped to his feet as fast as he could and ran down the path. He ran across the yard and through the clearing. He ran through the forest and all the way home, still wearing his clammy pink monster costume. He ran into his house and into the kitchen, where his mother was fixing his lunch for tomorrow. Oscar hugged her tightly around the waist and shivered.

"What's wrong this time, Oscar?" his mother asked. "You seem scared. And what in the world is that silly costume you're wearing?"

"I heard a terrible noise, and it scared me," Oscar said, clinging to his mother even tighter. "I want to lock all the doors and windows, and I want to keep the lights on all night."

"That must have been a terrible noise, all right," mother said. "You can stay up late if you really want to, but first, let's get some hot chocolate."

* * * * *

Back in the forest, Jimmy looked out from behind the tree. Then he walked over to where Billy and Dr. Spookly were standing. "I wasn't scared," he said.

Dr. Spookly looked at him, tilted his head, rubbed his chin and smiled just a bit. "Really?" he muttered.

"Well, maybe a little bit," Jimmy said, "But not much! I'm still here!"

Dr. Spookly smiled again. "I thought Oscar might scare himself. It's happened lots of times before. It's a strange thing about the kids who scare themselves. Usually, they become very good at playing the game of monsters.

"We've had a good lesson tonight. Tomorrow night is the second lesson."

Chapter III

The Second Lesson

As the boys approached the clearing the next night, the sky darkened and the wind began to blow. It blew harder and harder. Huge raindrops spattered against the leaves of the old oak trees and against the boys' jackets.

The boys ran toward the porch.

"Wait for me!" Oscar shouted. He was trying to hold his clammy pink monster costume under his jacket so it wouldn't get wet, and he couldn't run as fast as the other boys.

A brilliant flash of lightening ripped across the sky and a terrible roar of thunder shook the ground. Oscar almost fell down. "Wait for me!" he pleaded.

Oscar was still a few steps from the porch when the rain began to pour down on him. It was like someone in the sky had thrown a bucket of cold water at him. Water was dripping from his hair and his jacket when he got on the porch. He shivered and tried very hard not to sneeze.

Oscar inspected his clammy pink monster costume to make sure it had not gotten wet. "What do you think Dr. Spookly wants us to do tonight?" he asked.

"I don't know," Jimmy said. "I sure hope he doesn't want me to go into that forest again."

"Me neither," Oscar added.

"He'll probably want me to do something tonight," Billy said, "'cause last night I just watched."

As Jimmy was about to ring the bell, something like the howl of a wolf sounded from behind them. "Ooooooooooo! Oooooooooooooo!"

The boys whirled around and saw a pair of yellow eyes glaring at them from the edge of the forest, right next to the path they had just walked along. The eyes moved closer and the tall grass rustled.

All three of the boys banged on the door. "Dr. Spookly!" they yelled, "Dr. Spookly!"

The boys heard the latch on the inside of the door, and very very slowly the door creaked open. Oscar thought it was the slowest a door had ever opened in the history of the world.

The boys huddled up tightly against the side of the porch, all the time looking at the yellow eyes glaring at them from the clearing and moving toward them.

When the door was finally open enough, the boys rushed in. They stood up straight and took a deep breath.

"We weren't scared," Billy said.

Dr. Spookly nodded his head slowly and smiled. Then he spoke. "It's time for our second lesson. Change into your costumes in the dressing room."

The boys changed very quickly. When they returned, Dr. Spookly led them to a door behind the stairs. Beyond the door were rickety stairs leading to a cavern of darkness. The steps creaked loudly as the boys followed Dr. Spookly.

At the bottom, a stale, musty smell filled the air. Eerie music came from behind a dark curtain in the corner. Dr. Spookly lit his candle. There was just enough light for the boys to see costumes hanging from the rafters: ghosts, monsters, witches, goblins, and astronauts. They seemed to jerk and twitch with the music.

Billy jumped to his feet and frantically looked for some place to hide. The trunk was the only thing he saw. He grabbed the lid and started to lift it. Then he heard the snakes hissing. He started running back to Dr. Spookly. But the costumes hanging from the rafters had moved, and ran into four ghost costumes before he could stop. The eerie music was louder.

Billy dropped to his knees and crawled under the costumes as fast as he could and hid behind Dr. Spookly.

Dr. Spookly turned the lights on and Oscar stepped out from behind the curtain. "That was very good, very clever," Dr. Spookly said. "Instead of waiting to **be** scared, you did something yourself. That's one of the secrets of how to be a good monster."

Dr. Spookly turned and led the boys up the stairs. "Tomorrow is your last lesson," he said. "At the end, you will get a diploma, and I will give each of you a very special monster name."

When the boys had changed out of their costumes, Dr. Spookly opened the front door and quickly ushered them out of the house. They heard the door close behind them and lock.

Then they remembered the yellow eyes that had stared at them from the clearing. When they glanced that way, they saw that the eyes were still there, looking at them. Suddenly there were two more eyes, and then two more. The eyes were all moving toward them.

"Let's get out of here," Jimmy shouted.

The boys ran as fast as they could toward the path in the forest. When they ran past one pair of eyes, Billy tripped over something. The pair of eyes shook and toppled over on top of him.

"Help me!" he shouted.

Oscar and Jimmy stopped, hesitated just a moment, and then ran back to Billy. His feet were all tangled up in a piece of string, and he was kicking wildly.

Jimmy grabbed Billy's feet, untangled the string, and looked at what it was tied to.

"Look at this," he said. "This isn't an animal. It's two little flashlights, rigged up to look like an animal. Somebody was pulling on this string to make them move."

The three boys picked up all the flashlights, and the rigs they were mounted on, and the strings they were tied to, and carried them up to the porch.

"There," Jimmy said. "Let Dr. Spookly try to scare somebody else next time."

Chapter IV

The Third Lesson

"Tonight," Dr. Spookly said, after the boys had changed into their costumes, "there is a group of cub scouts camping out down by Dead Man's Creek. I want you to find a way that all three of you can work together to scare them. Just follow me and think very hard."

Dr. Spookly tossed a canvas bag over his shoulders, and gave one to each of the boys. He then led them down a long narrow path behind his house.

They had walked a ways when Billy suddenly said, "Ouch!" He stopped to get untangled from a jumble of vines and thorns.

"Shhh!" Dr. Spookly whispered. "Just keep thinking, and don't make any noise."

They walked on. Suddenly Oscar asked, "What's that?"

They all stopped and listened. Sharp squeaking sounds were all around them.

"Those are vampire bats. They sound like they are hungry. If one gets tangled up in your hair, stand perfectly still."

Oscar swallowed hard. "I'll try," he whispered.

They walked on a little farther, until they could see the scouts around a campfire in a clearing by the creek. Dr. Spookly opened his canvas bag and poured the contents on the ground. He motioned for the boys to do the same.

"Let's see what we have here," Dr. Spookly muttered. "Here's a bag full of

cold, clammy rubber snakes. Here's one with chains you can shake to make lots of noise. Billy, your bag has three small flashlights, a horn that sounds like a terrified owl, and a life-size tin skeleton. And your bag, Oscar, has hundreds of huge plastic spider webs.

"The leaders always tell stories to the boys just before bedtime. So yesterday, I took a book of terrible horrible ghost stories to one of the leaders for him to use tonight. That should put the boys in the right frame of mind."

When the scouts got up from around the campfire and headed toward the tents, Dr. Spookly whispered to the boys, "You boys go on ahead and figure out how you are going to scare them. I'll watch from here."

"How are we supposed to do that?" Billy asked.

"That's for you to decide. I'll wait here and watch."

Jimmy, Billy and Oscar looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders.

"Go on," Dr. Spookly whispered impatiently. "You need to scare them before they fall asleep." He pushed them a little bit with his hands.

The boys picked up the bags of equipment and went down the hill to a fallen log. They sat there and whispered to each other for a long time. They kept pointing to different parts of the campsite. Finally they went down to the scout camp.

They hung the tin skeleton right over the path to the camp. They hung the plastic spider webs about face high a few feet from the tent.

Then Oscar adjusted his clammy pink monster costume, shined a flashlight on his face, and stood at the edge of the dying campfire.

Jimmy went behind the tent with the chains.

Billy snuck up to the door of the tent, with the rubber snakes in his hand.

At his signal, he and Oscar began roaring as loud as they could. At the same time, Jimmy ran noisily through the underbrush, rattling the chains as he ran. "Help!," he screamed. "Help me!" With that, he threw himself against the back of the tent and moaned.

Billy threw the plastic snakes into the tent and ran down to the creek, shining the flashlight on his scaly orange monster costume.

The tent was suddenly alive with gasps and shrieks. Scouts fell all over themselves trying to get out of the tent -- whether through the door or under the sides -- screaming as they went.

They ran straight into the spider webs, and screamed again, desperately looking for a place to run.

Straight ahead of them was a clammy pink monster.

Down by the creek was a scaly orange monster.

The path was blocked by a horrible looking skeleton.

Behind them was -- well, they didn't know what it was, and they didn't want to find out.

The leaders were yelling at the boys to stop, saying that it was all a joke. But the boys had already run up the hill and were half way home.

While all this was going on, Jimmy sneaked up behind Dr. Spookly and yelled. "BOO!"

Dr. Spookly jumped and whirled around. When he saw Jimmy, he smiled. "Very good," he said. "You scared me!"

By this time, Oscar and Billy had returned.

"That was very good," Dr. Spookly said, with a smile on his face. It was the first time the boys had ever seen Dr. Spookly really smile. "You are now ready to be on your own."

Chapter V

Graduation

The next night, Dr. Spookly met the boys at the door. "How did you like the game we played last night?" he asked.

"What game?" Jimmy replied.

"The scout-scaring game. You boys were very good."

"It was a game?" Jimmy looked confused.

"Of course it was a game. Everything about being a monster is a game, and you boys played your parts very well."

"You mean we didn't really scare them?" Oscar asked.

"Oh you scared them all right. They were screaming all the way to the Burger Doodle."

"Then it wasn't really a game," Billy observed.

"It was part of your training," Dr. Spookly replied.

The boys looked at each other, and took deep breaths. "Humph!" they all said together.

Dr. Spookly led them to another room. "I'll have everything ready for the graduation in a few minutes. In the mean time, you can wait in the parlor."

He opened the door and ushered them into a big dark room. All the boys could see was a tattered couch in the middle. Red blotches stained the fabric.

"What are those red stains on the couch?" Oscar asked.

"Maybe somebody spilled some cranberry juice," Billy said.

"Or maybe it was cherry jello," Jimmy added.

None of them wanted to say that the stains looked like blood.

When they heard the door hinges scraping, they whirled around to see the door closing.

The boys then looked all around the room, trying to get used to the dark.

"Jimmy," Billy whispered. "What's that?" He sounded nervous.

Oscar and Jimmy looked toward the corner where Billy was pointing.

"It looks like some kind of box," Oscar observed.

"That's not a box," Jimmy said. "It's a coffin!" He sounded very nervous. He looked around and pointed to the opposite corner. "There's another one!"

Then the moaning started. It came from the first coffin. Then another moan seemed to come from the second coffin. The moans got louder and louder.

Then there was another sound: the creaking of a coffin lid as it was being pushed open.

"Let's get out of here," Oscar pleaded. The boys ran to the door and yanked on it, but it was stuck. The moaning was getting louder, and they could see the coffin lid begin to move.

They huddled up against each other as tightly as they could, and looked frantically around the room.

"Look," Jimmy whispered, "there's some kind of light over there. There must be a window behind those curtains."

They ran to the window. Billy held the curtains back while Oscar and

Jimmy strained to try and get the window open. The sound of moaning got louder and the other coffin lid began to creak open. "Hurry," Billy pleaded.

Finally the window popped open and the boys crawled out on to the porch.

* * * * *

Dr. Spookly met them at the front door again. "That was the final test, you know. All monsters have to know how to get away from scary places, even when they're not wearing their costumes."

"We weren't near as scared this time as the first time we came." Jimmy said. He tried not to let Dr. Spookly know how his heart was thumping in his chest, or how hard he was breathing.

Dr. Spookly smiled. "Even though you were scared," he said, "you did what you had to do to get away from there."

He took the boys into his office. When the door creaked open, three bats flew out over their heads, shrieking as they went. On the mantle, a candle was burning next to an eerie portrait.

"Who is that?" Billy asked, pointing to the picture.

"Ah," Dr. Spookly said. "We don't talk about him, especially at night."

Billy looked at it more closely. "Look!" he said, "It's autographed. 'To Dr. Spookly from the Count.' Is this a picture of Dracula?"

"I think you boys had better not get too close to that picture," Dr. Spookly said. "We have other things to do tonight."

The boys looked all around the office. Cobwebs hung from the ceiling and from

the picture frames. The dark pictures showed terrible storms ravaging the forests. They showed ghosts and dragons. There was also a picture of Elvis near

the door, draped in black.

The boys didn't shiver a single time.

"Let's see," Dr. Spookly muttered to himself, "Where did I put those diplomas?"

He looked on the mantle. He looked in the cookie jar. Finally he glanced down at his desk. "Ah, There they are!" He picked one up and read it:

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Dr. Spookly's School for Monsters | |
| Demons and Dragons, Ghosts and Goblins, Ogres and Oysters, welcome to their club: _____ | |
| (Monster name) | |
| and award him the degree: | |
| Master of Monstrosity | |
| _____ | _____ |
| Vladimir V. Spookly, D. M. | Date Awarded |

"All I need to do now is fill in your Monster names: `Jimmy J. Monster, Oscar O. Dragon, and Billy B. Goblin.""

He wrote their names on the diplomas and signed them in red ink. Then he stood up and motioned for Jimmy to step forward. He handed him his diploma, hung a pendant around his neck, and shook his hand. The pendant was a plastic model of a large black bat with sharp claws and narrow green eyes. It was hanging upside down, so the eyes were looking right into Jimmy's eyes. Oscar and Billy also received a diploma and a pendant.

"Boys," he said, "tomorrow is Halloween, and you have an awesome responsibility. The honor of monsterhood is in your hands. Monsters all over the world want you to succeed. You must never disappoint them."

With that, Dr. Spookly led them onto the front porch.

"Remember the motto," he said. "Monsterdom Forever!"

Suddenly a terrible clap of thunder roared through the sky. Wind shrieked through the trees, and rain poured from the dark clouds. The boys whirled around, pulled their jackets around their heads, and disappeared unafraid into the darkness.

PART II:

ADVENTURES

Chapter VI

Halloween

The night was making itself dark. The air was cold. The wind was howling with a terrible moaning sound. It blew against the face of the little girl who was lost. She pulled her coat tighter around her shoulders, but the cold wind made her shiver and shake.

The moon was hiding behind the clouds. Every once in a while, it would look out, just long enough for her to see the blood red color of its face, and the angry snarl of its mouth. She looked for a place to hide. But everywhere she looked, trees and bushes had their arms raised above her, as if waiting to grab her.

Off in the distance she saw a dark house surrounded by trees. "Maybe that's where I'm supposed to go," she muttered to herself.

As she got closer, she saw a faint light flickering from two of the upstairs windows. They looked like the eyes of a ghost. A tall man in a long black robe was looking out of one of the windows. The porch below was shaped like a toothless mouth, curved in an angry grin. The shadows beneath the window seemed to be struggling back and forth on the ground.

She looked at the paper she was clutching in her hand. "Alice must travel through the forest, beyond the clearing and beneath the red moon. The ghost house will then appear."

"This looks like the right place," she said to herself. "I've never seen anything this spooky. What a great place for a Halloween party!"

When she stepped on the first step to the porch, it moaned as though it

were alive and had been injured when she stepped on it. The girl shivered a bit and stood absolutely still. Then she stepped up to the next step. It creaked and moaned also. By the time she reached the door, thirteen and a half boards had creaked and moaned.

She put down the box she had been carrying, opened it, pulled out the pieces of a long pole, and put it together. Then she removed a life-size plastic skeleton. It was almost twice as tall as she was. She carefully hung it from the pole. The skeleton dangled just in front of the door.

Then she knocked on the door, three times, slowly and loudly.

Suddenly the door flung open. There stood a horrible terrible slimy green monster with its arms spread out and its hands trembling. Behind it was another horrible terrible monster, glaring at her in the faint light of a candle.

The girl gasped and jumped back. Then she grabbed the pole the skeleton was on and began shaking it. Its bones rattled loudly. The skull shook back and forth, and then fell off and rolled toward the monsters.

The monsters shrieked and ran back into the house.

"Jimmy J. Monster, or whatever you call yourself," the girl called out, "what are you doing wearing a stupid mask like that? I've told you how dumb that is."

Jimmy stepped up to the door, holding his monster mask in his hand. His plastic bat was dangling from his neck. "What's the big idea, trying to scare us like that?"

"You were trying to scare me. What's the difference?"

The other monster, who had been standing behind Jimmy, lifted his arms up and said, "Boo-oo-oo."

"Oh cut it out, Oscar. You're almost as bad as Jimmy."

Oscar giggled and took off his mask also.

"Where are Dr. and Ms. Spookly?" the girl asked.

"They're in by the fire, waiting for you to get here with the marshmallows," Jimmy answered.

"Did you remember to bring them?" Oscar asked.

"They're right here in this box," she said.

Just then, a huge black cat dashed wildly through the open door, screeching. The skeleton started shaking. Its bones rattled louder and louder. While the boys were staring at the skeleton, Alice reached in her pocket, pulled out a long curved bone, and threw it on the floor in front of the two boys. Then she jumped back, as though she was frightened. "Oh no!" she cried. "It's a rib. From right next to the heart. And look, it's got a bullet hole in it."

But Oscar and Jimmy didn't see the rib with the bullet hole in it. They had both jumped behind the door. When they finally peeked out, they saw Billy and Alice putting the plastic skeleton back in the box. They were both laughing.

"What are you doing here?" Jimmy asked Billy. "I thought you were helping Dr. Spookly with the fire."

Billy laughed again. "We had this all planned out. We knew you were going to try to scare my sister, so we decided to scare you instead."

"That's not fair!" Oscar said. "She hasn't even been to monster school!"

"Maybe I have and maybe I haven't," Alice replied. "After all, there are lots of ways to learn how to scare people."

"We weren't scared," Oscar protested. "After all, nobody believes in skeletons any more."

Alice ignored him.

Just then, Dr. Spookly looked around the corner. "Come on in, kids," he said. "It's time to roast the marshmallows. After all, there's more to Halloween than just trying to scare people."

Chapter VII

Monster Repellant

"What's that package that came in the mail today? Is it something for me?"

"No," his mother said, "that's Monster Repellant. There were some terrible monsters down at the scout camp last week, who scared the children half to death. I think they even scared the scoutmasters."

Billy swallowed hard. He pulled on the sleeves of his sweater to make sure his monster costume wouldn't show.

"You don't know anything about that, do you?" his mother asked.

"No, not me," Billy answered quickly. He tried to look her in the eye, but ended up looking down at the floor.

"What's Monster Repellant? And what do we need it for?" he asked a moment later.

"Janie wanted us to get some, so the monsters wouldn't scare her. Here, let me show you what it is." She unwrapped the package and produced a metal canister, like the kind bug spray comes in. The label showed the monster repellant and a terrible monster cringing in fright. He looked like he was also trying not to sneeze.

"Let's see what the directions say. `Wait until just before the children go to bed and spray their rooms. Spray around the windows and doors. Spray in the closet and under the bed. Spray behind the furniture. Then say the magical words. After that, the children can sleep all night long without worrying about anything."

"If a monster comes into a room that has been sprayed, he will start to sneeze. He will keep on sneezing for as long as he is in the room. A monster cannot stay in a room that has been sprayed without sneezing."

Billy looked worried. Then he felt his nose begin to itch. He started to ask his mother a question, but decided not to. Then he asked a different question. "Won't the monster spray make everybody in the room sneeze?"

"No, there's a guarantee that nobody but monsters will sneeze. We'll try it out this very night."

Billy tried very hard not to look worried.

* * * * *

After supper, and after the children's bedtime stories, Mother and Dad got the Monster Repellant, and everybody went to Janie's room. Billy was very fidgety. Mother handed the children a piece of paper with the instructions printed on it.

"We're supposed to say the magic words together, loud," Dad said, "and we're also supposed to stomp our feet."

Dad and Mother took a big breath. "O. K. Here we go. Everybody read together! And stomp together!"

"Monster, Klopster, you are bad;

you are banished from this pad!"

"Monster, Klopster, you are wrong;

sneeze away the whole night long!"

"Monster, Klopster, you will see;

it is time for you to flee!"

Mother and Dad didn't notice that Billy wasn't reading very loud, or that he wasn't stomping his feet at all.

Dad took the Monster Repellant and began to spray. He sprayed around the windows and the doors. He sprayed in the closet. He sprayed behind the furniture and under the bed. Billy rubbed his nose, to try to get it to stop itching. "There!" Dad said. "That'll teach those monsters a lesson!"

Janie smiled a big smile, hugged and kissed her mom and dad, and climbed into bed. "Good night," she said, "I'm going to sleep great tonight."

"O. K., Billy, your room is next."

"Monsters don't scare me," Billy said. "I don't need to have my room sprayed."

"Let's spray it anyhow," Dad said, "just in case."

"No, I don't want it sprayed. I, uh, I want to show how brave I am."

"That's very good," Dad said. "But suppose a monster waits in your room until after you're asleep. It's very hard to be brave when you're asleep. But when the monster starts to sneeze, that'll wake you up. Then you can be brave."

"Dad, I don't want my room sprayed!" Billy sounded rather nervous.

"O. K.," Dad said. "Some of the monster repellant in Janie's room will probably seep over into your room. That should be good enough."

Billy rubbed his nose again and kissed Mom and Dad good night. He went into his room, locked the door and stuffed a towel under it. He opened the window as far as he could. He pushed his bed next to the window, and laid down with his head right under the open window.

He tried and tried to go to sleep, but he kept worrying about the monster repellant. After a half hour or so, he smelled something strange. He pulled the

covers over his head, but the smell was still there. Then he started to sneeze.

He held the pillow over his face to try to keep anybody from hearing. But Billy was a very loud sneezer. In fact, he might have been a world champion sneezer if anybody had ever held a contest for that kind of thing.

Then the worst thing in the entire world that could possibly happen happened. He heard a knock on the door. "Billy," his mother cried, "are you all right?"

Billy answered her by trying to say, "Yeah, I'm fine. I've just got a little cold." But what came out was very different from that. "Yeah, I'm . . . achoo . . . I'm fine . . . achoo . . . achoo. I've just got a little cold . . . achoo."

"Let's have a look at you," Mother said. She turned the handle on the door, but found that it was locked. "Billy," Mother called, "come open the door."

"I'm coming . . . achoo," he said.

Billy quickly pushed his bed back to the center of the room, grabbed the towel and threw it under the bed, and opened the door.

"I think I've . . . achoo . . . got a little cold," he said, as he sneezed again, and sniffled a huge sniffle. "I just need a glass of water."

He went to the kitchen for the water. On his way back, he stopped by the bathroom to take off his monster costume -- which he had been wearing under his pajamas.

"I feel better already," Billy called to his mother. "I think I'll sleep just fine tonight."

Chapter VIII

The Pale Gray Ghost

Oscar went to visit his aunt and uncle for the Halloween week-end. The whole time he was riding on the bus, he kept thinking of ways he could scare his cousin Alvin. Oscar dropped off to sleep sometimes, but as soon as he woke up again, he thought some more about how to scare Alvin. Twice he reached down inside his backpack, to make sure he had brought his costume.

Aunt Flossie and Uncle Tom met him at the bus.

"Where's Alvin?" Oscar asked.

"Oh, he's home reading," his uncle replied. "He's reading about monsters and ghosts and dragons, and stuff like that. It seems like he actually thinks they're real."

Oscar smiled. "This is going to be easy," he thought to himself, "and lots of fun."

That night, while Alvin was taking his bath, Oscar put on his clammy pink monster costume and slipped behind the curtains in Alvin's bedroom.

In a few minutes, he heard the bedroom door close. The light was switched off and the room was plunged into darkness. He heard Alvin's footsteps as he walked to the bed and tussled with the covers. Then silence.

Just as Oscar was getting ready to start moaning his very scariest moan, he heard the sound of hissing from the floor behind him. He froze. The hissing got closer. Soon it was joined by more hissing in front of him. He felt something brush against his ankle.

Then a kind of buzzing sound -- like lots of tiny rattles being shaken. He tried to stop his heart from pounding in his chest, and even tried not to breathe. He felt something crawl over his feet.

Suddenly the curtain wrapped itself around him and began to pull him down toward the hissing on the floor. He pushed and squirmed to try to get free, but that was hard because he didn't dare move his feet. His body got closer and closer to the floor.

Just as he was about to fall, the lights in the room came on. He pulled the curtain aside enough to see a pale gray ghost with blood red horns growing from its head. It was standing by the light switch, holding a rope connected to the curtains.

"How did you like my toy snakes?" the ghost asked cheerfully. It was Alvin's voice!

"What toy snakes?"

"Those that were hissing and rattling at you. I just got them from the monster's mail order catalog. They're pretty good, aren't they?"

"They didn't scare me!" Oscar declared. He stepped out from the tangled curtains that clung to him. He looked at the toy snakes on the floor. "You got those from a catalog?" he asked.

"Sure. Dr. Spookly's Monster Catalog. There's all kinds of monster stuff in there."

"Dr. Spookly? He has a catalog?"

"He sure does! All kinds of stuff."

"Did you get a diploma too?"

"Absolutely! It's there on the wall, behind my mother's picture."

Oscar looked at Alvin's pale gray ghost costume, and then at his own costume. He sighed, hung his head, and walked slowly to the door. "G'night, Alvin," he muttered.

When Oscar got to his room, he took off his clammy pink monster costume and packed it away in the bottom of his backpack. "Being a monster isn't as much fun as I had thought," he mumbled to himself. "If somebody like Alvin can be a monster, then anybody can. Big deal!"

Chapter IX

The Monsters' Hall of Fame

"Dr. Spookly," Jimmy said, "our monster costumes have all shrunk, and we've only had them for a week. They're too small for us now, and we want to give them back to you."

"You boys do look like you have grown a bit. I wonder how successful you were at scaring people over Halloween?"

"Oh, we were very successful. We scared lots and lots of people, didn't we, Billy?"

"We sure did, lots and lots of people. But our costumes are so tight now that we can't wear them."

"Really?" Dr. Spookly said. "You really scared lots and lots of people! Well, maybe this is a good time to retire."

Dr. Spookly continued. "Let's go and put your costumes in the Monsters' Hall of Fame." He motioned for the boys to follow him.

In the very back of the house was a room the boys had not seen before. The notice on the door said, MONSTERS' HALL OF FAME. ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK.

"It's all right," Dr. Spookly said. "You can come in with me." He stepped into the room and turned on the timer that turned on the lights. "We have three and a half minutes before the lights go off and the bats begin flying."

The boys could hear the ominous, relentless ticking of the timer.

The room was quite large, with several long aisles of glass panels. Behind each panel was a monster costume.

"Wow," Billy said, "I didn't know there were this many monsters in the whole world!"

"Oh yes," Dr. Spookly said. "Lots and lots of people have been monsters. When they got tired of playing `Monster,' they brought their costumes back here to me."

The boys walked down the aisles and looked at all the monster costumes and read the names of the people who had worn them.

"Wow," Jimmy said, "have all these people really been monsters?"

"They sure have," Dr. Spookly answered, nodding his head.

Jimmy read some of the names out loud. "George Washington, Tom Sawyer, George Bush, James Kirkland . . .

"James Kirkland! That's my daddy's name! Don't tell my daddy was a monster!"

"Oh yes, your daddy was indeed a monster -- and a very good one. So was your daddy, Oscar, and yours was too, Billy. They were all monster when they were boys."

"Daddy's costume looks really little. Was he ever really that size?"

"Yes he was," Dr. Spookly said. "He was ten years old at the time."

"What was my daddy's monster name?" Jimmy asked.

"Ah, now that's a secret. Nobody can ever know another person's monster name. Just like nobody can ever know your monster names. Those are secrets between you and me."

"Dr. Spookly, these are all boys' costumes. Aren't there any girl monsters?" Billy asked. "I've got a little sister, and she is already kind of like a monster."

"Of course there are girl monsters. But their hall of fame is in South America, right next to the Amazon River."

Good!" Billy said. "Maybe she'll move down there to be with her monster friends."

The ticking of the timer seemed to be getting faster.

Dr. Spookly held out his hand for the costumes. "Are you sure this is what you want to do?"

"I think so," Jimmy said. Then he added, "Maybe you could put mine next to my Daddy's" Oscar and Billy nodded in agreement.

Dr. Spookly took the boy's costumes, put them on black coat hangers, and hung them in an empty space along the thirteenth aisle, next to their fathers' costumes.

"There," he said. "Your careers as monsters have come to a close. You don't ever have to pretend to be monsters again. You don't even have to follow the monster's oath."

Oscar looked at his friends. "I don't think I'll miss being a monster. I've got too many other things to do."

"Me too," answered Jimmy and Billy.

Just as they opened the door to leave the room, the timer went off. There was a muffled explosion as the lights went off, then a fierce gust of wind blew against their backs. Four bats flew over their heads, screeching, and the low guttural roar of a lion filled the room. Dr. Spookly closed the door quickly.

Dr. Spookly then led them back to the front porch. It was still daylight, and

the trees and shrubs looked beautiful. Even the Spanish moss danced happily in the breeze.

The boys smiled, shook Dr. Spookly's hand, and ran across the yard and into the forest.

The End