

Second Words

A. Dumas and Associates Publication



Scared Too

by
Samuel Leon Dumas



About This Story

Spring Break, 2013: The Three Musketeers, Haille, Hayley, Taniayha (and Molina), asked me to write another School-Story. So I did.

The story is less about the characters stitched in page, and more about the author's own fears. He was 15 years old when he crossed his mirror in front of his monster-alien closet. He also slept with the light on...until the year 15.7.0812 (Star Date, of course) when he found the real Higgs Boson in a library book, and with that found, all physics was changed.

—*D'fils*, a 21st century writer



Scared Too

By D'fils

(A School-Story about The Three Musketeers)

It was as soon as her bent knee hit her baby sister's white duvet for their nightly monster ritual, that Dianna Layley intensely begged to her: "Promise you won't tell, Dad! Promise you won't tell him what I'm going to tell you!" Her sister's voice was not above a whisper, and as if adding more urgency, Layley laid her small fingers over her big sisters hand on the story book while she pleaded.

Haille Simper didn't think it strange that she, an eighth grader, was reading bedtimes stories to her five year old sister every night to keep the monsters under the bed satisfied. Here they were for the hundredth daily monster ritual, which meant Haille would read to a consortium of non-existent monsters cavalyring under Layley's bed, and to tear the mirror from the wall and place it just so against the closest for security and surveillance reasons.

What was strange though was how more grown up and intense Layley sounded just now. It was as if she wasn't worried about the monster stuff any more—at least at that moment—there seemed something more important. And Haille knew most definitely—once and yet, again-- it was some juicy thing she had heard Mom and Dad talking about as Layley hid behind the banister at the top of the stairs spying at the two sitting by the fire.

Haille shook her peeved face back and forth. "Honestly, Dianna LayLay, I don't know why you keep spying on mom and dad, they need quiet time *alone*."

"I know, it's not private of me..." She pursed her lips as if she were perturbed at herself, smoothing back her short dark hair. "I mean I shouldn't, but I learn so many secrets when I..."

"That's what makes it private, cuz that's when secrets are told... honestly, I wish you would hurry up and grow up."

There was a small serious moment of something like silence, but instead of falling on the five year old with a quick sting of hurt, it was almost as if the precocious sister expected those words to crop up again so that she could retort back, "Me too, cuz then I could be one of the Three Musketeers, with you and Tawnee and Molina."



“No, you’re still too young, and you need to practice, Laylay.”

“It’s not Lay-lay—you keep calling me that--it’s Lay-lee. Mom named me Layley.” Now, there it was, a piece of hurt trying to sting back.

“I’ve always called you Laylay every since mom and dad brought you here and I held you; but I’m starting to regret it since you keep me reading to monsters, or whatever the reason you drag *me* into your room every night.”

“Well...I didn’t tell you to hurry here for that tonight, I wanted to tell you—“ She paused. “--but you have to promise...you have to promise not to tell.”

“Okay, tell me, --then can I tell *you* for the millionth time that there are no monsters under your bed or in the closet--and go back to my room?”

“Promise!?” Layley insisted. ”Cuz they might get mad if people found out what Dad said to Mom...and me—they knew I would be spying. They always know.”

“I know, and I promise.”

Layley leaned real close over the big story book, her weight pushing it into the fluff covering, then, softer than a baby’s breath, her little voice intoned the offering of the final telling, “So Dad and Mom are talking about if he died before her what to do with his ashes, and Dad says that he didn’t want the undertaker to bury him with his mouth open because he didn’t want the missing tooth in the back to show.”

“Because he said that we didn’t have the \$8,000 dollars to fill the tooth in and his insurance wouldn’t cover all of it...or something.” Haille chimed further twice as loud as her. “Anyway, Dad was joking...no body is ever put in a casket with it’s mouth open, ever.”

Layley’s eyebrows flew up, then fisted angrily together and froze in that position. ”You already knew!?”

“And you would have too if you were old enough to listen—all the time, instead of listening for M—“

Layley closed her eyes tight and shook her whole head vigorously back and forth. “Don’t say it, I already know...I am the only one in the house who can hear monsters.”



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Haille plopped her folded knee again onto Layley's bed, attended this time by a final huff signaling that this ritual was finally over. "Okay, just like you want it: the mirrors down off the wall sideways on the floor in front of the closet door so that if anything—"

"Monsters," Layley said.

"Anything--" Haille, poked verbally, "Comes out of the closet it will knock the mirror down. And with it sideways on the floor you can look into it and see under the bed—*if*" and here Haille rolled her grey eyes along the upper rims of her eyelids, "the light is on or *if* there's a full moon shining in, okay?"

Layley smiled at her big sister. "I'm clever, aren't I." Then not really seeking approval, added, "If the light goes out cuz it gets old, I can use the moonlight to see under the bed. Cool thinking, huh." She scrunched her eyes then slowed her words a little. "Well, it was Auntie Tawnee's idea, she said she saw it on TV where the burglars busted out the street lamp so that it was dark enough so that the surveillance cameras wouldn't see them when they broke in."

"Yeah, it's an idea, I get it—if the monsters bust out the hall light you got backup, okay..." Then she added forcefully, "and I repeat, I am *not* reading to monsters tonight. It's late, and I have to go 'put my books to bed,' now go to sleep..."

There was a cute simper on Layley's young four freckled face when she said, "You always sound like dad."

Haille smiled tenderly at that and reached out to touch her sister's cheek where the scar was. She stared for a moment into her sister's bright blue eyes, running her thumb over the small scar remembering sorrowfully back to the day she had gotten it...when Laylay was three, and when Haille and the 'gang' were breaking bottles with rocks and Laylay was standing too close and one of the glass pieces had bounced up and cut her just under her eye. At that moment Haille reflected on the thought of how similar her sister's fears were to some of her own. She wanted to admit, as gently as she might, 'I'm scared too—of things.'

But she voiced, instead, "Course, I sound like him sometimes, he's one of my mentors."

With that reply sort of coming out like a 'goodnight' Haille went back



into the hall, and Layley climbed under the pink trimmed duvet and went to sleep...with the light on.

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When Haille came into the kitchen the next morning, Layley was spooning out the tomato bits from her bagel pizza. Haille could smell the burnings of toast that still hung moist and warm in the upper kitchen air. It made her think of how tall she was; to be able to smell and feel things on another level, compared to when she was younger coming into this very same kitchen. Her younger sister's face was squinting up with an intense Charlie Brown frustrated lip wrinkle. Her eyes nearly crossed as she focused on the task of digging out every last smallest bloody *bits*. Haille went to the frig for milk, and to see if there was any smoothies left to put in her lunch pail. None. Mom probably got the last one.

At the sink she leaned over to check through the window at the day's cloud pattern. "Dad cooked...uh...the bagels again, huh," she said, hearing her voice echo out of the stainless steel sink, and up at her. Craning her gaze from window corner to window corner, Haille could see Chayce Banion dancing in her yard across the street, her black and white soccer ball bipping and bipping again as her high stepping knees kept it artfully in air-play. Haille remembered Chayce telling her last weekend that her boyfriend, Cameron, had been teaching her all his neat soccer moves; now, it seemed that she was always proudly practicing—in the front yard no less.

"Yeah," Layley finally grunted, "he forgets that I don't like the tomatoes."

Haille sat down next to her sister. "That's probably why the monsters under your bed never eat you each night—one lick of your toe jam and they know you don't have enough tomato in you. Everybody likes tomatoes on things, but you."

"Well you're still here too, and mom and dad, so it's not the tomatoes thingy...and by the way," Layley was finally letting her mouth do the crunch thing with her bagel pizza. "I been thinking, I'm not too short to be the fourth musketeer of your band."

"I keep telling you, it's not a band; it's an ensemble."

Hayley licked the crumbs from her lips and went on to her 'I figured it out point'. "But what I mean...Tawnee's almost my height. I'm only two inches shorter than her. If she could pass for an eighth grader, then so



can I. My teacher said I'm already almost two grades ahead in class."

Haille paused in mid milk gulp, then as she finished swallowing she thought up an answer to her precocious sister's almost brilliant tactic. "You're just very tall for your age, and you're almost six, so you're not quite two grades, really. But, even that, you're not an eighth grader in school height,"—whatever that could mean—she was trying to make her reply too complicated for Miss Andress to follow, but somehow where Haille thought she was going with it, *it* had dead-ended in her own head, so she fell back on the usual, "Besides, no eighth grader—"

"Don't say it, I know it: eighth graders are *not* scared of monsters under the bed... geez you always say—" Layley went back to bagel-in-mouth-stuff-then-eat movements.

Haille circled her now empty glass around in the milk slime that somehow had gotten under her glass. Yeah, Bright-Girl was right, she did rely on that phrase a lot—the whole family probably did over due that one. Then she said, matter of factly to soften the hardness that now lay between them, "Well, that doesn't mean eighth graders are not scared too; I'm scared of things more frightening than monsters under the bed."

"Like what?"

Haille was readying her lungs to say, but when she glanced at the clock on the wall, she realized that there were things that she wanted to do before Layley's bus made its brake noise at the corner. Their middle school was doing conferences all week and Mom and Dad had delegated her to get sister on her bus. "Maybe," she half promised, "I tell you tonight *after* I prove to you *once and for all, and even all for once,*" -- and she winked her so-clever pun line into her little sister's excited expectant face, "that there are no, no, no monsters here."

"Okay. Okay." Layley too was looking at the clock. "So, mom said that it was okay for your band..ensemba to come over tonight."

"Yeah, only Molina can't make it, she has to help her dad set up all those computers he sold; so your Auntie Tawnee and I will have to practice without her."

"Why do we call her *my* Auntie Tawnee and nobody else's, anyway."

Haille squabbed her lips briefly together; not mad or anything, just letting the warm feelings of almost forgotten memories bop around inside her head for a while, before she answered. "I already told you that



when you asked me that a year or so ago. She was the first one of us to wash her hands and hold you when Dad and Mom brought you home with them. I had forgot about mom's rule; but Tawnee didn't and was standing there with her wet hands clasped together like a surgeon's, smiling like a big Cheshire cat." She went on now with all the glows of that memory in full play. "And, she was my best friend...and Mom even let me bring her to the hospital with me when you were born. I guess she was the first person other than family that I introduced you to."

"Oh!" Layley's eyes lit up, "Oh! Then she was the first black person I ever met!?"

"Well, I don't think so—some of the nurses and hospital people, who kept checking the black thingy on your belly button, were black."

"Oh. Well, anyway, Auntie Tawnee still likes me and maybe the first *other* people I met don't still like me."

"I'm sure they take care of a hundred thousand babies and have forgotten you by now, but what makes you think Tawnee likes you. (Really, to tell the truth, it wasn't hard to answer that, if you looked at their relationship all the years, her and Tawnee had a special learning bond—the kind that never goes away when the baby blankets stretch into twin duvets. The two had remained somehow linked from that first proud couch-holding-baby-inspection hour.)

Layley sighed, her hands clasped under the table now, ready to answer the question. "She's always teaching me new things, and she smiles a lot at me. And talks a lot...and crazy funny talk—with me."

That reminded her of what Mr. Hoddis, the school custodian had said about smiling: you can tell how genius a person is if they smile with their eyes.

"Yeah," Haille muttered, and then thought, not really surprised that her mixed-up precocious Address sister would especially detect that endearing quality of Tawnee's, *She does have a great smile, and a very useful and intelligent mind.*

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When they walked to the six-kid bus line, Layley was still pleading to be needed that evening as the fourth musketeer.... "I know Auntie Tawnee wouldn't mind, but if you'll let me, I could even be the third musketeer then—just for tonight. And show you I can be just as smart as Tawnee, even if I am not exactly as tall as her."



School Sayings

by
Mr. Dumas

The more words you *know*, the more jobs you can get.

* * *

If a youth has five talents then we should find five mentors
for that youth.

* * *

Math is the easiest subject to teach.

* * *

If you want more clicks on your 'like', choose more and
more better words that come out of your *personal* website.

* * *

Physics!

* * *

Speak to me kindly like a thought,
for then are you mine.

* * *

We only have each other for a short time...we must so
craft the need to inflame the questions that come from
each other that in so living we will learn to love.



“Yeah, we could use a helper, since Molina has to go help her dad make money, and can’t bring her musical genius tonight. We’ll just make it a ‘half fun practice session’ tonight only.”

And the five year old, almost six, not-so-baby sister was still dancing when it was her turn to climb the steps of the yellow rumbling bus.

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Haille was still wringing her hands when she came from the kitchen. All the way down the hall to the rec room, she was thinking of what her mom had told her while washing dishes, about her music teacher almost getting fired because of what she had done at their last concert. They hadn’t fired Mrs. Runover after review, but they severely consulted her with a demand that in the future the microphone be used by all presenters of formal concerts.

Several families had complained that this was the fifth year she had stood on the stage and talked the history of each piece or the growth of each orchestra section and such and yet in the bulletin she had printed, it stated how the school considered this a formal event and expected the highest level of deportment from the audience, during and after the concert.

Haille could hear Mrs. Runover just fine from her first chair in orchestra, but then she sympathized with the family members who had been in the war and had grenades crush into there very minds damaging their ears year after year. Who knows how many fathers and mothers could not hear well enough the musical surprises she was telling about their dear performing children. All that flavor, lost because Mrs. Runover was not using the microphone that was cradled ten feet away.

Anyway, Haille was glad they had not fired her—couldn’t really fire her for something like that—because she was a very wonderful music teacher. The Three Musketeers had matured with her for almost three years. She also had helped them decide on their name and their motto: three for one, and all for three. She said it was almost a palindrome and like the motto of the *real* Three Musketeers.

When Haille reached the end of the hall to the rec room she could see *her* Auntie Taniayah was teaching sign to Layley on the couch. She watched as Tawnee’s brown hand moved size for size next to Layley’s so white skin, holding her sister’s fingers so gently as she positioned the fingering of the sign just right.



She recalled her sister's bubbly words earlier on the way down to the bus stop: 'Good, I mean I like Molina but then tonight I get to be *the* three musketeer—only three, just me, you and Auntie Tawnee...because she held me first when I came home from the hospital.' And now in her mind, Haille was adding, "right there on that very old couch."

She saw how still Layley was as she learned, her blue eyes moving all over the places being manipulated by Tawnee. To be proud of her was easy, but to watch her best friend work with the Andress so patiently made her remember how with pride she watched Tawnee hold her new small form in that little blanket—eight happy years ago when they were little more than babies themselves; sitting there holding across their laps a new unique life, wondering what that new life would do on this planet. Well now she saw. It made her pause, quietly observing as she enjoyed the deep feelings and the Haille smiles the scene was causing.

For all of Layley's precociousness, Haille was proud most of the way her baby sister listened. In a year or two of using that skill maybe she could one day be one of their Three Musketeers, or sadly, perhaps, one of someone else's ensemble. Haille thought about what that would look like for a moment, then questioned how monsters, if they persisted, could get in the way of all that. After all, at 7 or 8 you can't go to school knowing your friends all know you're still at the 'thumb sucking stage of monster befriending'.

Nevertheless, Haille was still very proud indeed of her sister and had an idea in mind for changing Layley's fears, as well as her own.

All through practice Haille spied at her while she and Tawnee scrubbed their bows next to well practiced fingering. She noticed how intent her sister sat, back straight, smiling worshipfully at the musical two musketeers. She could just about see the gleam in her sister eye of really enjoying her 'one step closer' to being the fourth addition to their budding ensemble. And when her Auntie Tawnee asked her to retrieve the practice violin from Haille's closet, she saw how the Andress opened the case and respectfully lifted the violin holding it just exactly the way Haille had shown her only a week ago...yes, yes, it just could be, that this very little spark of genius mentality could one day be a value-added asset to their ensemble.

That flow of wishful words truly began an even greater 'Haille smile'—a big one that reminded her of Grandma's lifelong tease, "Don't smile too big so much, it'll make your eyes pop out." But yep, Haille kept smiling anyway, especially now that she knew this little portentous underling was fast becoming a lover of music just as Haille and her dad were.



So it was all the more important at ritual tonight to say something to help all that. For there was no room for monsters on the performing arts stage. Just room enough for perfect pitch, you and the performing arts audiophiles who came to see you put the chinrest under your left or right chin and sway your frame like the mad air demons that stores used nowadays. And when you're done, to smile and *bravé* for you, now that your bow has finally burned all the sweetest singing out of your instrument.

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The lights around the mirror in the bathroom shone so that Haille could see pretty good on both sides of her face. She could even see the tiny covering of blonde hairs on her skin. That was good because whenever there was a pimple that blipped, Haille was *on it* with her finger-tweezer, to pop its little white eye out.

That made her think of things that Dr. Dumas told her and her mom about the documentary he had seen on Las Vegas, "If you build it, they will come," he said, meaning something close to what he was saying about her budding face: if your face keeps growing and building new tissue and all, these pimple-people will come. And you can take care of them when they get here, and not worry too much about next years pimples being large and such."

Her Mom always complained that Dr. Dumas talked too much and used too many words for a doctor, but Dr. Dumas once told Haille, "You only have me for a few minutes and in that few minutes I want to help you as much as I can; I am giving you instruction--and your monies worth-- for your care tomorrow when I am not around."

Haille hummm'd at those thoughts, feeling her own breath puff off the mirror's smooth surface as she dug, pulled and gouged at her face, making the skin become mottled with red which always came when she obsessively did this serious 'face-off' with her teenage physics.

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Laylay was waiting on her bed again. But Haille had no big book with her and did not un hinge the mirror from the wall in preparation for closet duty, not tonight—or maybe not yet anyway. Haille sighed heavily; it was time for things to be said. As best she could she wanted to give words that might make a difference for her sister; now, while Haille was not in college, and like Dr. Dumas said: while she had her in front of her.



Haille decided to intro séance style: “We are gathered her together in monster bedroom to discuss some serious things before we plead with aliens and monsters not to eat little children anymore...”

Haille paused then, her eyes still closed. But her beautiful still effect was shattered by an android sequitur from her sister.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, apparently un-phased by the theatrics of the seconds before, “I forgot...while you were taking so long in the bathroom, a boy called on the phone for you. I told him I’d go upstairs to get you, but he just said to tell you that O. O. called—you’d know who he was--and that he wanted to tell you that he liked the song you guys were practicing in your ensemba in the music wing.”

Haille stopped in the middle of finger dogging her hair, “Oh, I think I know for sure who you mean, Orion, his friends call him O. N. O. He’s the one Mr. Hoddis comes and mentors at Bobcat Club because he wants to be an engineer; so Mr. Hoddis took him and a few of the others down and explained them the boiler room.”

Then another Haille smile quickly caboose behind these words, “And, you know, Orion was the only one who thanked me for thinking of the Custodian during Teacher Valentines Day. He said ‘good on me’ for being the only one to send Mr. Hoddis a valentine card for keeping the place so ‘well-up’ during school. He said his mom always taught him to give flowers to people, even if they already know they are doing ‘well-up’ work, as he calls it. I think their family is British or something.”

“So...” Layley leaned closer, and said almost with an air of secrecy, “How did he get our number?”

Haille’s right eyebrow jerked up. “I don’t know...but I’m sure I can find out whose big mouth thought it was a good idea for him to call me.”

“And how come he didn’t just call your cellphone? He could have gotten that from your friends at school too.”

Android Laylay had a point: Aye, Captain, why did O.N.O. follow the rules, as opposed to doing an end-run around parents the way most of her boy-likes did, —and texting her phone? *What is this something you just did O.N.O.?* Good on you, too! And, for sure, *I’ll Follow You Into The Dark*, is a very beautiful song.

Haille tilted her head, looked at Layley upturned expectant face and said, “So anyway, we are gathered here together in monster bedroom to discuss some serious things before we plead with aliens and monster not to



eat little children anymore.”

“Okay, so tell me all the things...is it boys that are some of the things you are frightened of?” It was another android sequitur.

Haille froze for an instant; her sister was close yet not even close. Haille had learned to play boys like she played her violin--it certainly wasn't that, exactly. Boys she could see; boys she liked.

“No, and not exactly. And let's talk about monsters first,--your monsters. If you're going to be an Andress about everything else, let's be real and think like geniuses about monsters, for once.”

“Okay, I'm ready for that speech...again. Then after will you tell me your spy stuff?”

“That's why we're here. I half promised, remember?” Well, she might as well admit it, if she was going to try to de-monsterfy the kid once and for all.

“So, tell me how many monsters have you seen in your life Miss Simper?”

“I think I saw a whole bunch of them. I'm a good eye-spy.”

“Okay, how many did you see getting dug up by the backhoe in the turn where they're putting drains by the wetland?” She paused only briefly for pin-point high effect. “I mean, I guess they have to hide someplace during the day. So...and how many times have you come home from school and I have asked you how'd your trip to school go and you wimped out a lazy answer like: uh, fine.”

No answer. Layley did a shock look, a solitary blinker that froze the whole front of her face. Only her eyes moved frenetically in front of an obviously busy mind.

“Alright, I am 252,288,000 seconds older than you are and—“

“Wait. How do you know I am 252 million seconds exactly?” Finally, something that more resembled the Andress broke the question railing.

“Well, if you must know that detail. Blake Potter got up in history class one day, touched his glasses—as he always does—and then tells us that President Reagan was in office for 252,288,000 seconds.” The genius mind was still stuck, but with an ‘O’ mouth on her slow moving face. “So, I'm eight years older than you, and in 252,288,000 seconds I have



never seen a monster, other than the ones I made up when I was your age. And when I got on the bus I never saw one get run over by our driver. If I had I would have told you that story a thousand times by now instead of reading about Jack-kid who fell out of a tree with a golden Gus, and then killed the jolly green giant that was chasing him with a MCGuyver paper clip.

“No monsters got run over by my school bus, no monsters running away from the bus stop with a kid in its mouth. None, no time at all!” She didn’t stop. “And if we had seen them doing that kind of thing, then that would be normal and everybody would be out with shotguns hunting the wild things.”

Layley’s face did a pop-quiz expression, her skull lurching backward, her neck stiffening with strict awareness. “What do you mean normal?”

“That would be normal because the monsters would be following the rules. And if there were those kinds of problems with them, people would be on the news every night telling how many they killed that day. What is not normal is when a monster doesn’t follow the rules... monsters like yours. They don’t follow the rules, so therefore they don’t exist—even in fairy tales they follow the rules mostly. But yours don’t.”

Haille stopped to observe: I’ve stumped the Android; she wasn’t expecting this.

She went on, the ‘roll’ was going *down* now. “So every night, you place your warm meaty bones on your bed and the big-footed monsters come from somewhere and march around under your bed, *silently?*, not making any noise at all? All night you sleep and all night, the later it gets, the hungrier old monsters never even think to wake you up by biting your toe nails off at the knee or something. And eight hours later, the hungrier they get, at four am still they don’t follow the rules and go down the hall and bite Mom or Dad’s nose off because the rules of hunger says, ‘Eat!’”

Like the kid in the movie, *AI*, Haille’s almost six year old Andress was still frozen, blaise blank.

“And you know something, if something doesn’t follow a rule, then probably it doesn’t exist; and society has a problem when that happens. All bears eat in the woods, all tigers eat in the jungle and wild animals get their breakfast lunch and dinner—including Laylay Simper. You had bagel pizza for breakfast. And you followed rules to do it. So you exist and you can get run over by a bus if you run across the street. Ever see one of your pet monsters running across the street and getting hit?”



“I didn’t know bears know enough to think about rules.”

“Well, they don’t...really...know about them but they just follow rules anyway; they can’t help it.” Haille searched with wiggly eyes, then said, “Well it’s just like: we’re studying in class about the Hadron Collider where scientists are looking for a particle atom that will change our thinking about all physics. But my science teacher, Ms. Geranimo, says scientist are desperately hunting for this Higgs Boson thing and since no one can find it and it doesn’t seem to follow the rules of physics then most researcher are not sure that it exists...”

Haille knew for sure that that probably went way over her little sister’s new skull, but Layley straightened her back and with a half-smile, popped with non sequitur this time, “I even sometimes think them up a school when I’m bored.”

Just out of nowhere; great admissions exploit.

“So, maybe this can help: in the country, when Dad is teaching me how to drive, he tells me that one of the rules is to drive about 15 seconds down the road, looking about that far down the road for things that might jump out in front of us...and not look six miles down the road worrying about far away things.”

“Oh?...things like what?” and the princess face was aglow, and her voice almost singing with seeming words like ‘go on, now...yes...spit out your spy stuff’.

“Like boys or men who don’t follow the rules...and small small monsters in your mouth that eat your gums all night if you don’t brush your foods out... or if you don’t clean your face off of pimples that twenty years later someone in the executive board meeting might remember your acne and laugh. Stupid stuff...like stupid worries.

Haille paused, pursed her lips; Layley only leaned quietly closer, with her resolved pushy blue eyes.

“I guess, I’m scared too, Layley. But not of monsters like yours, that are here, now, but about whether my husband will come home drunk thirteen years from now, or whether I’ll even find a decent one. I created what Dad calls *worry monsters* from the future and bring them under my bed kinda, and that I am being afraid *now* of things that doesn’t exist. Like you, I was afraid of a monster that didn’t follow the rules, --like Mary’s cousin in *The Secret Garden*. How stupid I felt when when Dad helped me realize that.



“All these thousand days you and me and Dad and Mom have been sitting on your bed, right here, and you didn’t listen—do you remember when Mr. Hoddis, the custodian, came over after our last performance and said something to us.”

“You mean the, Oh—I remember, he said, ‘I am the Real Sam I Am, I walk and I talk, I’m not just a picture on a page.’ He has a lot of white hair and a lot of keys.” She elevated her eyebrows, and nodded her whole grinning puppy face as if self punctuating her own recitation.

“Well, every since I gave Mr. Hoddis that school valentine last year, he smiles when we see each other. He says he has never missed a concert performance in twelve years at the school. He says that the violins are the best part. And that The Three Musketeers is one of the best groups he has heard so far.”

“I saw that he wobbles when he walks. Did he get hurt or something?” Layley asked, with a serious human look in her eyes.

“Yeah, he said that he broke both legs in a car accident when he was little and the bones did something...*genesis* and didn’t heal right. Told me, always wear your seat belt, listen to your people when they tell you things. When I remembered that, I thought of you and us practicing today when it was just me and you and your Aunt Tawnee.

“And earlier I saw you listening to Tawnee and I thought, ‘what is she listening for’ and then it hit me what Mrs. Boff-Lund the Librarian at school sometimes says to me, ‘Haille, I notice that you are always listening for words; here’s a book you might enjoy.’

“So I’m standing there watching you and Aunt Tawnee, and I see you doing the same thing I did at your age when I heard music--you were reading the things that don’t have words, you were watching what we did with our sheet music at practice, you were getting more words from us the ‘experts’ so that you could become one of the Musketeers. While your were doing that you were listening for words, and not listening for monsters which don’t follow the rules. Mrs. Boff-Lund also says, everyday almost, when we are in Library Class, “The more words you *know*, the more jobs you can get.”

The adoring little sister couldn’t stop listening; but that thinking face in front of her only invited Haille to, Speech-On!

“Today, I finally saw that there really was hope for you because you listen—sometimes it’s called spying but—Layley, you listen very well.”



She purposely said Layley, not Laylay, as encouragement, and to reward her serious attitude. But there was no cute android-like follow-up, no non sequitur, not even an Andress sequitur. But Haille could clearly feel a warm bonding-ball settle between them, with all of Layley just *glowing on* in her listening trance. So Haille, not wanting to break that special spell, gently ever, breathed out more of her ‘spy’ stuff.

“So if the monsters I had created under my own bed were real, really real, then they would have followed the rules of evolution and gobbled up my raw meat the instant they saw me. The fact that they didn’t, tells me I shouldn’t fear that monster, because they don’t follow the rules, and if they don’t follow the rules, then they probably...”

“...don’t exist.” Finally the Andress with the puppy, scarred face spoke with brevity and whisper, at last giving hint that she *was* following her.

“Right! So, today, when I thought about you, I knew how to prove to you that you don’t have to keep reading to the monsters under your bed. When evolution makes a monster that monster follows the rules, but you’ll notice that when a kid creates monsters, the monsters never follow the rules. It’s as simple as that. Pretty neat, huh? Your older genius sister figured it out good.”

They both stared at each other with proud family smiles on their faces. The warm listening appreciation seemed to grow thicker around them, yet remaining like a sponged two pronged tuning fork sending out its warm subtle under currents of sound.

“You’ll notice that I didn’t once look at the mirror while we were talking your speech, because I want to be grown up—and let someone learn me the rules, like you and Chayce and Auntie Tawnee. I mean...like follow bigger grown up rules. That’s a sign of growing up, right...So...” she said with growing deadness of oldness, “as soon as I grow up—and practice--can I be a fourth Musketeer then?”

“As soon as...”

Haille’s hand automatically went over to touch her precocious sister’s face. Layley lowered her eyes, moving her cheek into the warm moist palm when her sister’s thumb finally caressed the scar. Haille knew that making her sister happy would make the monsters go away and stay away. Letting her ‘grow’ into The Three Musketeers would truly make her joyful, but Haille was not sure about having to change their ‘Three for one, and all for three...four?’ Haille shook her head almost imperceptibly—she didn’t know if that ‘four’ word was ever going to work for her.



Then Layley's new take-charge tones brought her mind back to the now. "You know why I always ask you to read to me every night instead of Mom or Dad, because I like listening to your words, the way you say them, and I like how long you stay. Dad can only stay a short time because he says he has to put mom to bed...but you stay the longest of them all and I like listening to your secrets."

"Aww...thank you. And that's a good sign that you are growing up: listening to words that are here...and not, like me, listening to words and things that are years in the future."

"Does this mean," Layley's shoulders and arms hunched once, upward, and her voice went squeaky higher, questioning-like, "that you are one of my mentors now?..."

"What do you mean?"

"Well I listen to Auntie Tawnee and do what she says. And I listen to you and try to do what you say that makes sense...so, then you're one of my mentors too....'three for all, and all for three', we're partners now, right?"

Haille noticed that she was now hugging her precious little sister.

"Yeah, I guess, it does."

"Okay, then, do you got any more spy stuff you can tell me about..."

Haille Simper simpered big, knowing for sure that they would not be reading to monsters that night.

The End

