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## The Little Girl And The Monster

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*Though she be but little, she is fierce!*

William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

The twin moons rose over the empty valley, casting their faint light over the monster, a beast the size of a horse that strode in and out of the shadows. It was a huge animal, not a lion or a wolf or a bear, but all those things at once and more. It was shrouded in brownish fur, with a ridge of coarse black hair running the entire length of its body and flaring into a short bushy tail. Under the fur, powerful muscles rippled with energy. Its mouth curled back to reveal row after row of sharp triangular teeth gleaming in the faint light. Its ancient name was Kiga Norn, but those who knew and feared it called it the Nightwalker.

The Nightwalker was roaming through the countryside, circling around Mandeville but always making sure it stayed clear of the town. As it walked through the hills and valleys, there was only one purpose in its mind: it needed to find food. It was hungry.

It wandered into the garden of an estate at the foot of one of the nearest hills. It was one of those sprawling habitations of which humans were so fond. Flower beds and weeping willows graced a manicured lawn, amidst a labyrinth of neatly trimmed hedges. The Nightwalker inspected the property, searching for prey, impervious to the beauty of the scene. Some distance away, at the end of the garden, there was an open gate and beyond it a terrace behind the rear of the palace. The terrace, like the building, was utterly dark.

The beast then came upon a fountain. At its center was a statue of Uralia, the goddess of crops and flowers. She held a downturned cornucopia on her marble shoulders, from which a trickle of water arched steadily onto a pool at the goddess' feet; the water ran off the rim of the pool into a large fountain below. By the edge of the fountain stood a little child, four or five years old. She was playing with the waters: she would splash her hands and scare away tiny goldfish that

then scampered about in the fountain. Every so often, she would dart a brief glance at the goddess, as if expecting to be scolded.

The Nightwalker approached the girl very slowly. The girl took notice, but did not try to run away and gave no signs of fear. This delighted the Nightwalker intensely – there would be time to play before eating.

The beast put on the friendliest face it could muster. "Hello, little girl" it purred.

"Good evening," she returned calmly.

"What's your name?"

"Carina."

"That's a very pretty name. My name is Kiga Norn, but you can call me Kiga. Where are your parents?"

"They are asleep."

"How about the servants?"

"Everyone's in bed."

"What are you doing out by yourself so late?"

"My fishies called me. They wanted to play." She turned around and pointed to the goldfish in the fountain.

Kiga Norn went over to the edge of the fountain. It put a paw in the water and swished it about to startle the fish, so they would keep circling around.

Carina laughed. Kiga Norn grinned back at her. Then it glanced up at the statue of Uralia, only it was no longer the goddess' face that showed, but the scowling mask of its faraway master. The girl saw it too, and let out a little yelp of surprise.

The Nightwalker sought to put the girl at ease. "It is my master, but he is looking at us from very far away. Come over and play with me." Carina came next to the Nightwalker and started picking twigs off its mane.

Kiga Norn growled at the small stabs of pain and the girl giggled. She got up, walked around a few steps and fell, scraping her knees. Settling down on the grass, she started to whimper.

"You have been idling. You have a tremendous distance to cover," chided the voice in the statue, "and very little time left to do it. You will need to travel day and night to catch up with our

enemies. You must go through the caverns under Urdom to protect yourself from the rays of the sun and gain time. But no more idle talk. You must get going on your trip."

Uralia's vacuous features returned to the statue.

"*That's too bad. I have enjoyed strolling in this country*" Kiga Norn thought to itself. Then it looked hungrily at Carina.

Distant voices reached them. The palace lights were being turned on, and steps could be heard approaching.

"Carina" called voices that kept sounding closer.

Kiga Norn was famished and was a thousand leagues away from its destination. It would take every bit of its strength to get there, and once in the caverns under Mount Daylon there would be nothing to eat but those disgusting trollorcs. It must feed now. It pawed Carina lightly, but the shove sent her rolling a few feet.

As it took a step towards the prone child, servants carrying torches entered the garden from the other end. The Nightwalker did not give the situation a second's thought: it was under orders to avoid being seen by humans before reaching its destination. In another step, it was next to the Carina, ready to snatch her and have her for a snack while it traveled.

Then Kiga Norn realized that, for all its hunger, it could not bring itself to consume the plucky girl. She was very cute and had been nice to him. And Carina weighed so little that consuming her would hardly satisfy its hunger. Another jump, and Kiga Norn went past the girl, bidding farewell to her out of the corner of its mouth:

"Bye, Carina!"

The girl rubbed the tears off her eyes and saw the Nightwalker jump past the garden fence, unseen by the servants.

Carina frowned. Her mommy would not believe a word of her story when she went back.

THE END

Bio:

Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Over two hundred and fifty of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in anthologies, magazines, blogs, audio books, and podcasts. One of his four novels, an autobiography entitled "Cuban Transplant," and four anthologies of his stories have also been published.

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