

JAGGER
TIME SERVED
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CORNERSTONE BOOK PUBLISHERS



“I don’t like mornings much. Come to think of it, I don’t like much, much,” Jagger said. His deep voice filled the modernly decorated office. He fidgeted, pushing his sweaty palms across the chaise’s taut surface. A squeak escaped as his hands fought against the leather’s grip.

“The more pressing concern is why you don’t like mornings?” A middle-aged white man in a sweater vest asked. He spun a pen in his hand, forefinger to thumb, over, and then back again.

Jagger reached his right arm across his body, rubbing his left shoulder.

“Everything aches, Doc.” The short sleeve of Jagger’s t-shirt rode up his arm as he reached across his chest, exposing several small scars and a thick bicep.

“I see,” Doc paused, jotting down some notes before continuing. “How has it been — getting to work in the morning, I mean? Are you having problems with the work?”

“Not really. But it doesn’t matter. I do the work or they put me back.” Jagger looked down and resumed rubbing his hands across the leather, increasing his pace. The friction burned his palms.

“Just like I have to come here. It’s not my decision,” he continued.

His voice was rough, matching his appearance — like flannel to a farmer.

“Are you nervous?” Doc asked, continuing before Jagger could answer. “Why do *you* think you have to come here?” Doc’s voice elevated mid-sentence, emphasizing that he was interested in why Jagger thought he was in treatment, not in what the cops, the judge, or even he had told Jagger.

“Some suit sitting behind a mahogany desk thinks I’m crazy.”

“Do you think you’re crazy?” Doc asked, and then glanced towards his own mahogany desk.

“I think bad shit happens all the time, and more than a fair share of that shit seems to find the bottom of my shoe.” Jagger leaned back onto the chaise, relaxing his previously more aggressive position.

“And do you think that what happened was just another case of you accidentally stepping in some shit?”

“I made mistakes.”

“Do you think that your behavior in the past put you in situations where you were more likely to make these mistakes?”

Jagger forced a cold, unnatural grin before responding with an answer he didn’t truly believe. “Definitely.” It was all part of the show, the act. The cold exterior protected the equally shattered interior.

“And do you think that a particular mistake may be the reason that you are sitting here talking to me with two parole officers outside that door listening?” A brief flash of satisfaction spread across Doc’s face, like that of a prosecutor after leading a witness into an admission.

“Only two?” Jagger asked.

“Why, yes. You are a free man, James. Sure, I get it, you work an unfulfilling job as part of your parole. You have to answer to people, be places, check in, keep your nose clean, but despite it all, you are a free man. There’s something to be said for that.”

“You don’t go from what I was, to what I did, to where I am, and call it free.” Jagger stared angrily at Doc. “This is *not* free.”

“It’s temporary. With good behavior, a strong work record, and a few good references, your parole obligations will be fulfilled by

2012 at the very latest.”

“I’m not talking about parole. I’m talking about things I can never undo. It’s in my head. It’s always in my head, haunting me, ripping my focus apart, stealing my life. It’s the last thing I think of before I fall asleep, and the first thing I see when I wake up. When I walk down the street, do I think about my groceries, my job, or the weekend? No. It’s always there, consuming me, reminding me, bringing me back, always bringing me back, to what I’ve done, who I’ve hurt.” Jagger was yelling now, but it was almost unnoticeable to him.

His words burned in his throat. He felt flushed, his heartbeat accelerated to a palpable and terrifying pounding in his chest. A soft tingling feeling took over his body. It was like a bed of nails, except all over his flesh, pushing, pressure, more fear than pain. The sensation started in his legs at first — debilitating, as if he had been sitting Indian style on a concrete floor for days. Only the sensation didn’t stop there. It only intensified. *It was happening again.* The feeling moved upwards, ripped into his body. It then coupled with a paralyzing loss of motor skills. He started feeling the same sensation in his face that he had in his legs, only stronger, throbbing, and it migrated downward from there. The feeling met in the middle, at his gut, creating wrenching convulsions. He looked up helplessly at Doc.

“Not again.” Jagger managed through his clenched jaw.

“Jagger, look at me, breathe.” Doc reached out for Jagger’s arm, but he pulled it away. “You can control it. Just breathe slowly, calm your body. Fixate your eyes on something in the room. This is only a manifestation of your mind. Remember the steps. Tell yourself: stay in the here and now, keep your feet on the floor, keep your mind where your body is. What am I doing now? What do I need to do now? I’ll deal with trauma when the time comes.”

Jagger tried to breathe, tried to clear his mind, but his body would not cooperate. Doc’s abstract instructions seemed pointless. His face, back and legs broke out first in a dampening sweat, and then beads began rolling uncontrollably down his back and legs. His hair was instantly saturated. He stood, but his legs stubbornly resisted. His face tightened with effort, and he made it to his feet — feet that felt foreign, unlike his own.

“Accept, don’t fight. You can be anxious and still do this. You will



Doc stood and rushed towards Jagger as his body swayed unsteadily.

accept this anxiety and continue doing what you must. It is okay to be anxious. It is okay not to feel in control.” Doc’s words floated around Jagger, but they didn’t reach him.

Doc stood and rushed towards Jagger as his body swayed unsteadily. Doc’s knee struck the end table as he passed. It rocked sideways on two legs before it dumped his glass of water and followed, crashing to the hardwood floor. The glass shattered and large shards scattered, accumulating in the puddled water. Doc, off balance, desperately thrust his right foot outward into the puddle for balance. The sole of his expensive leather loafer flew along the wet floor as if on ice, and Doc jerked back, fighting to regain his equilibrium. It was too late, and he fell backwards towards the shards of glass on the floor.

Jagger’s chest tightened. Unconsciousness attacked his body, and the room spun wildly out of his control. He managed two rigid-legged steps forward as Doc’s shadowy figure filled his blurred vision. Jagger reached outward and pushed the streaking figure with all his might. Doc went flying across the hardwood floor clear of the glass shards, sliding to a stop near the door. Jagger’s body crashed to the soaked floor. Glass ripped into his shoulder and arm.

The two guards burst in the door. “What’s going on?” The larger one asked.

“Get out of here. You can’t be here now.” Doc reprimanded the guards as he rose to his feet. The guards retreated towards the open door.

Jagger squinted his eyes as pain ripped into his side. He couldn’t breathe. Doc had told him that panic was often mistaken for a heart attack. Lying there, his thoughts consumed with dread, he found the comparison accurate. Chest convulsions took over. His throat tightened. He looked towards Doc.

“You’ll be all right...”

Jagger’s vision betrayed him, his eyes wandered around the source of the voice in the room. His head hit the hardwood, bounced, and then nothing.

“Thank you.” Doc said aloud to the only conscious person in the room, himself.



It was wrong. Shade knew this. The act, he had been told, was pure evil, but again he found himself at that threshold. He would burst through — through the rules that held him, that held everyone, back. The container that defined society’s boundaries, of what was okay, and what was not. He was not okay. He had never been okay, and what he was again about to do was not okay. He could pause, but he could never stop. Only this time was different. This time he chose not to stop. Any reason to stop was gone, replaced only by reasons to do, again.

Joshua’s small hands explored the dark cold wall. It was foreign, completely unfamiliar. His mind, still groggy, cleared away the confusion of a sleep unlike any that he had ever had.

His eyes burned, dull but ever-present pain clouded his mind, and his arms hung, weighted with exhaustion. He pulled his palms back from the wall and rubbed his eyes with the insides of his balled fists. He could see sliding dark shapes behind his eyelids as he rubbed. He reopened his eyes to darkness. There was nothing familiar, nor unfamiliar about the blackness except the cold, coarse wall.

“Hello?” Joshua said. His small voice died into the room.

“Anybody? Hello? Mom?”

Joshua placed his hands back on the cold rock. As his fingers climbed the wall, Joshua stood, his legs tingling with sleep. He swayed softly, bracing against the wall for stability. He tracked the wall, keeping contact until he reached the corner of the room. From there, he tracked the abutting wall until jagged rock changed to smoothness, cold turned to cool. A door.

“Anyone there?” Joshua directed at the door.

He reached down the smoothness, his hands searching anxiously for a doorknob, a handle, anything. His right hand hit first, metal. He twisted, and the door opened to more musty darkness. Joshua stepped through the doorway and let his hands lead him blindly.

“Where am I?” he cried. Confusion transitioned to fear.

“Mom. Dad?”

Joshua moved slowly. A lone tear carved through the dust layer blanketing his round face.

“Help! Is anyone there? Please help me!”

“Hello, Joshua.”

Joshua gasped. “W-Where am I?”

“Where you belong.”

“Who are you? Why am I here?” Joshua asked the strange voice through sobs. Heavy breathing dissected his words.

“Please. Call me Shade. I’m here to help. Myself.”

“Where’s my mom?” Joshua spun slowly in the darkness trying to fix on the location of the voice.

“Your mom is fine, but you’re mine now.”

“I want to go home.”

“I’m sorry. I really am.”

“Please take me home,” Joshua begged. He was again moving now, faster through the darkness. His hands contacted another wall, and he used it as a guide.

“Joshua.” Shade said.

No reply.

“It doesn’t have to be this hard. I don’t want it to be hard for you.”

Joshua moved along the wall, around chairs and desks, but always in contact with the wall. Then he felt the wall curve and the floor turn upwards at an incline. Joshua extended both arms out to

his sides, and both hands hit wall. A hallway. He hurried, now in an awkward jog. His heart pounded. He inhaled and exhaled loudly as fear taxed him of breath.

Then, Joshua heard it — a horn, or a whistle, coming from up the hallway. People. He sped up now, stumbling on the uneven floor. His shoulder drove into the wall and the impact spun him sideways. Disoriented, he again bounced off the wall, stumbled, and then collided with something firm. He fell backwards to the cement floor.

The darkness gave way to a flashlight.

“Help, please, someone took me.”

The flashlight’s beam swayed, slicing the darkness, still trained on Joshua’s face. Heavy breathing boomed from the void just above the flashlight.

“Please, help me.”

“Please.” Silence filled the room. “Call me Shade”.



Jagger awoke to the smell of aged wetness coupled with the potent scent that often stews in college dormitories, particularly men's dormitories. It was an eye-watering concoction of wet work clothes, stale air, and fish. It was a smell Jagger knew too well. A smell that only added to his feelings of isolation.

His bed lay squarely in the center of the dimly lit studio apartment. Sunlight filtered into the room from beneath the hanging blinds of the apartment's one tiny window. Jagger's huge frame dominated the mattress, his midriff barely covered by an old comforter strewn carelessly across his torso. His thick, scarred legs and shoulders escaped the blanket's coverage, exposed to the soft breeze of the vintage 80's ceiling fan above. The chain attached to the fan dangled, swinging back and forth like the shiny steel pendulum balls on Doc's desk. At the apex of each swing, the chain made a soft *ping* sound as it hit the hanging metal sheath surrounding each of the fan's three lights. The repetitive, *ping, ping, ping*, had become a rhythmic sleep aid Jagger had grown dependant upon over the last year.

Jagger glanced across the two-room apartment at the small battery operated alarm clock perched on his dresser. It read 6:29. As usual, he had awoken just one minute ahead of his alarm.

The minute hand shifted and the alarm began buzzing. The ringing was agonizing, even more so than usual. Jagger's head throbbed. He tried to sit up, but his back fought him in the opposite direction. He winced in pain. He slowly swung his legs over the edge of the bed and let gravity drag them to the floor. He reached straight up, hands locked, as he sat on the edge of his bed. He let out a half groan, leaned to his right, and cracked his back. He sat upright and repeated to his left with the same bone jarring results. He slowly rotated his arms at the shoulder, the joints caught, and tugged, and caught again, grinding until they finally rotated without resistance.

In the midst of his daily morning routine, his attention turned back to the alarm clock. It read 6:34. The alarm had been blaring for four minutes. He stood up, ushering the blood back into his legs by softly stroking his thighs. He walked gingerly towards the alarm clock and turned it off.

"Jesus," Jagger bellowed at both the buzzing and his aching head.

"Be careful how you address me, boy." A man said, leaning in the open doorway to Jagger's tiny apartment. The man smiled, the kind of shit-eating grin that Jagger had grown to expect from men in domestic uniform.

"Make yourself at home," Jagger said, barely turning to acknowledge him.

"You have yourself a nice rest there, sleeping beauty? Doc said you had a little bout with some anxiety." The man in uniform drew out his pronunciation of the word "anxiety," and emphasized it in a way that suggested he was addressing a young child, not a two-hundred-thirty pound man.

"Said I should probably pay you a personal visit this morning, see how the cuts on your arm are faring. You know, and see if you got your bearings back."

"Little headache, that's all," Jagger said. He carefully ran his right hand over the minor cuts down the length of his left arm.

"You look like you got your glass kicked." The man named Pinckney laughed proudly. "Think Doc called it a panic attack. For such a big, tough guy, you sure seem action packed with emotional issues." He walked further into the tiny apartment and sat on Jagger's

worn Salvation Army couch. He put his hands behind his head and locked his fingers while simultaneously shooting his legs out. He dropped them loudly on the rickety coffee table.

Jagger jumped slightly at the sound of the man's feet dropping on the glass, but kept his head down as he pulled his work shirt on. He moved towards the kitchenette, tending to his breakfast.

"Doc okay?" Jagger asked.

"Don't worry, he's fine, hero boy."

Jagger nodded, again ignoring Pinckney's incessant sarcasm.

"So how's work going, boy? I can't believe they pay me to ask you this shit." He finished the sentence under his breath and continued before Jagger could respond. "Your boss had some interesting comments about your effort. Says..." He paused again, this time to take a puff on a newly lit cigarette, "...he's worried you aren't committed to the team." He ended the sentence with a chuckle and an exhale. A noxious puff of smoke floated toward Jagger who swatted at it with a flat hand.

"I shovel frozen fish. Does that sound like a team sport to you?" Jagger responded. But he didn't look up as he tossed a cold bowl of oatmeal into the microwave.

"Keep at it man. I can smell a promotion coming your way. Seriously, I fucking can." He waved his hand back and forth in front of his nose. "Maybe they'll move you to lead cod man. Or transfer you to tuna. Sure, it's a lateral move, but everyone loves tuna."

Jagger grabbed his oatmeal and sat on a bar stool in the corner of his makeshift dining room. He leaned forward and turned on the small black and white television, turning the dial and fidgeting with the antenna until the national news came through clear enough to hear, and somewhat see.

Thanks, John, that truly is a fascinating story of survival and perseverance, the news anchor reported in a forced formal voice from her large desk in a network studio. She was attractive, with high cheekbones, and long blond hair tied back into a bun. Her smile reversed as she continued. Her eyes saddened.

Now onto some very unfortunate news, a recent kidnapping has shocked the small city of Cranton, New Hampshire. Joshua Caldwell,

eleven, was taken from his home while sleeping. Joshua is about four feet eleven inches tall, is thin, has brown hair and brown eyes. Here is a recent picture provided by the family. Police suspect the intruder entered through an unlocked first-floor window between the hours of midnight and four a.m.. The perpetrator then made his way upstairs, where he took the sleeping boy from his bedroom. It is suspected that the kidnapper carried the boy out the front door, leaving it wide open upon departure. The boy was discovered missing by his mother at around five-fifteen in the morning, when she awoke to find the front door wide open.

“Discovered missing, what the hell does that mean?” Pinckney growled. The reporter continued.

The motive behind the kidnappings remains unknown. Chief of Police Bill Turnbill held a press conference this morning, and he had the following comments:

Jagger’s head shot to attention at the mention of the name Bill Turnbill.

“This is a very serious situation that we are dedicating all of our available resources to.” Camera bulbs flashed as Chief Turnbill readjusted his glasses. “We are considering bringing in both federal and surrounding state and city authorities. Cranton will be safe again for your children, I promise you that. Please call the Cranton police station if you would like to volunteer for the search party. That is all we can say right now. I will be releasing further information as it becomes available.”

“You know that guy, maybe from your soldier days, before you became a lesser contributing member of society?” Jagger remained silent, choosing not to reward the man’s surprisingly astute observation with a response. Jagger stared blankly at the TV.

“Earth to soldier. This isn’t Iraq. What, you have that post-traumatic bullshit syndrome or what? Get moving, you have work in twenty.” The man in the uniform, sitting too comfortably on Jagger’s couch, eyeballed him. “Wouldn’t want to compromise your parole would ya?”

Jagger grabbed his oatmeal and work boots, and stormed out the open apartment door.

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Shadows littered the wall as light from a nearby street lamp illuminated the small second-floor window. The window shade bounced in the breeze. With each gust, the shade rose, only to fall to its starting position with a *slap* against the wooden window frame. Each time the shade rose, the wallpaper — covered with images of baseballs, bats and gloves — lit up, and just as quickly disappeared with a *slap*. In its effective position, the shade blocked nearly all light, leaving the boy sleeping in blinding darkness.

Only two months ago, Timothy had declared that nine years old was too old for a Batman nightlight. Tim, as he now demanded others address him, was no longer afraid of the dark. It was the proud accomplishment of a young boy looking forward to middle school. A boy who gloated to his Mother about how he could sleep in the dark, how he, “wasn’t scared, not even a little.”

Tim’s bedroom was scattered with toys and figurines, like that of any typical nine-year-old. Sports played a large role in the decorum, enveloping the space in an arena like atmosphere. Red Sox memorabilia and collectibles littered every inch of the room. To the boy’s right, a Big Papi bobble head nodded softly in the dark.

Tim’s bed was a small twin covered by a blue Red Sox comforter.

Under that comforter, Tim now lay — a small, round lump curled in a tight ball. Within that rigid ball, his hands pulled his stepdad's baseball glove tightly to his chest. The glove made him feel safer, even in the dark.

The figure moved as if dancing. It was a rendition he had seemingly rehearsed to perfection — like a performer, except this was no show. This was his work. Light from the moon shone upon him, cascading a shadow against the modest ranch that predicted each movement he made in just a moment's advance.

He sat crouched in the darkness far below an open second-floor window. His shadow moved slowly, deliberately along the west side of the middle-class cape. He traveled with purpose, exposed only to the dark confines of a private fenced-in back yard. He moved left to right, upright but stealthy. With each step, lean, powerful legs silently carried him in consistent intervals along the side of the house. At each window, his gloved hand — pale and deeply veined — boasted long, slender fingers extended upright.

The hand belonged to a man who, as a young boy had earned the nickname *Shade* because his pale skin required that he stay out of the sun. *Shade* was the nicest of the many names the other kids had called him, so he quickly adopted it. It was his one final attempt at ever-elusive peer acceptance. The nickname wasn't perfect, but it was better than *Skeletor*, *S-S-Sliver* or *Bones* — all names the other kids used to refer to his awkwardly thin frame, menacingly pale complexion, and mild speech impediment. So the man in the shadows now answered to *Shade*, because it was the closest he had come to acceptance, to simply being noticed.

Shade's arm exerted a gripping upright force on each window he passed. As each resisted, he quickly moved on to the next, dragging his gloved hands softly along the dusty vinyl siding of the home. He moved towards the edge of the western wall to the final first-floor window. It begged his attention, called to him, told him *this is the way*. *Shade* peered in through the glass, pointlessly, as he already knew from his scouting visit days earlier where the opening led, what furniture it contained, and what pitfalls would come from traversing it in the dark.

He peered around the right side of the home to the south wall, which ran perpendicular to the road. A set of headlights illuminated the street, and he quickly ducked back into the safe confines of the backyard. A car rolled past slowly, and Shade's body responded with stinging pleasure at the excitement of risk, threat of capture. It stimulated him, made the job fun again. His stomach dropped. He felt alive, reinvigorated. Thoughts of his ultimate goal, his prize, left a soft stinging in his loins. It was a feeling he had once paid his freedom for — an evil he had once managed to suppress. But circumstances, much like feelings, change.

He crouched, his back propped against the wall with his shoulders set firmly against the vinyl siding of the house. From beneath the sill of the window, Shade — tall, with broad shoulders and a lean, powerful torso — reached up behind his head and placed his gloved hand flush against the glass. He pushed upwards, slowly, patiently and evenly. A soft, *csihhhhhh*, escaped the window as the rubber seal at its base gave way. *There's always one*, he thought, as he pushed the window up from the bottom, opening it as far as his six-foot frame and impressive reach allowed from his perch on the ground. Shade rotated and secured the sill with his hands. He pulled with both powerful arms and elevated his face even with the window. Shade then rotated his arms and extended them outright, lifting his waist even with the sill. He then deftly lifted his right leg and inserted it silently into the house. With impressive balance, Shade released his grip, swung his second leg inside the open window, and slid towards the floor. He landed without a sound, facing into the dark dining room.

Shade relished not just the spoils, but also the process. His face, covered in black paint, spread horizontally to reveal a slight smile. "If you must, you must enjoy it," he said in a whisper to himself.

He turned and proceeded across the dining room and through the kitchen to the carpeted staircase. He reached out and grasped the staircase railing, stepping on the stair just inside the rail, where the stud traditionally held firm and the wood was strongest. Shade's feet moved confidently and quietly with each step. There was not a sound from the stairs as he expertly maneuvered like a cat on a

ledge. Shade spread his weight evenly between points of contact, the railing, his left foot, and then his right. He did so naturally and easily, his method uniformly distributing his weight between three points, lessening the pressure on any one, ensuring a silent, secret, assent.

Shade reached the top of the stairs and scanned his surroundings. A dim light flickered from deep down the hallway. He crept slowly towards the light, past a door, another door, and into the glowing room. He leaned over to the source of the flickering light and blew. The soft scent of candle smoke filled his nostrils. Shade inhaled, simultaneously containing and savoring the scent.

He looked across the hall and smiled. He took two steps and stopped. Shade stood still outside the room that held his prize. He waited there for a moment, and then another as his desire boiled over. He fought the urge, let it simmer and grow until he could no longer wait. A twinge of guilt hit him, but he suppressed it. This was something he both wanted, and had, to do.

Shade's gloved hand settled on the doorknob where he again forced himself to stop. This was traditionally his favorite moment. It was like sex for the first time, except he felt this every time. His exhilaration peaked and his stomach boiled over with anticipation. Although the door opened inward, he pulled the knob towards himself. This released the tension on the door's latch, and he slowly turned the knob. As the doorknob turned Shade was turned on. The door opened without a sound.

"Perfect. You need this. She needs this." He whispered, convincing himself again.

Shade's whole body yearned for his prize. For a moment, all guilt was lost, replaced only by insatiable desire.

A rhythmic *slap* emanated from the back of the room. The man took note of light intermittently entering the far window. As he walked in, he noticed a pattern. Light from a nearby street lamp brightened the room at intervals as the breeze moved the window shade to permit light. During those intervals, the far side of the room and bed illuminated, and the man could see the outline of a curled figure under the blankets.

Staying carefully to the darker side of the room, Shade took three slow steps towards the bed. His toes cleared each step, quickly surveying its intended landing spot before finishing each careful stride. Upon Shade's final step towards the bed, he extended his foot out-right and felt something — something round. He tried to avoid it, but instead softly kicked it across the hardwood floor. The window shade moved upward, and light illuminated Shade's eager face. He saw the bat he had just kicked roll along the pine plank floor. It started with a gentle whirring sound and ended with a patterned click as it skipped from board to board. It rolled four full rotations before coming to rest eighteen inches from its starting spot, now concealed under the bed.

“Hmmmmmmm...” A noise from the bed rose softly.

The lump extended lengthwise. Shade remained perfectly still, just a foot away from the bed's edge. Shade was now fully aroused. He fought the urge, contained it. It was better in the end that way. The prize, sleeping comfortably under the sheets, stretched his legs, and reached his arms upward and out of the comforter. Then he rolled onto his back, still facing the window, away from the dark stranger lurking in the room.

Shade, now overcome with anticipation, breathed heavier, in and out, hoping his prize would hear him.

The boy, alerted by a presence, rolled his body towards the darker side of the room just as the shade slapped back, eclipsing the street's glow from entering the window. Soupy blackness blanketed the room, thick, impenetrable. He stared into the vacant darkness beside his bed, straining his eyes. At night, he had often seen the outline of a shirt hanging on his desk chair and feared a monster was lurking. But he was older now, and knew better.

“Mommy, is that you?” the boy uttered, filled more with sleep than fear.

Shade stood by the bed counting in his head: one-one-thousand, two-one-thousand, three-one-thousand. Before he reached four, an uncontrollable grin overwhelmed his otherwise still face. The boy's eyes focused into the darkness, and fear swept through him as the wind blew and light from the window illuminated the outline of his

visitor's black, angular face.

Shade thrust out a hand, forcing a damp handkerchief over the boy's tiny mouth. He then lowered his eyes level with the boy's. "Be a good boy, and I'll..." Shade growled in a raspy voice, and paused. "Just be a good boy."

This time, a monster was lurking.