

## **The Little Monster**

By: Ildy Lee

The delivery room's harsh lights blinded Elena. When the baby slipped out, the circle of faces above her changed to expressions of horror. One nurse burst out, "Oh my God! What's this..." The doctor cut her off, "Control yourself Nurse. Don't scare the patient. Whatever it is, go and clean it up. We'll deal with it later."

Elena tried to make a desperate attempt to raise herself and see what was going on, but she felt weak and groggy, so she fell back on the gurney exhausted, and drifted off into a deep sleep.

When Elena opened her eyes in her private room, her first words were, "The baby! Where is my baby?"

The nurse cleared her throat and softly said, "Miss Johnson, we need to talk.

"What's wrong? Is my baby dead?"

There was a painful silence, except for the ticking of the clock on the wall. The nurse locked her steel-blue eyes onto Elena's. "The baby is alive, but it is very severely deformed. Honestly, it looks more like a monster than a human baby."

Elena gasped for a second, then burst out in tears:

"I don't care! I need to see my baby. I want to hold it in my arms. Is it a boy or a girl?"

"It's a boy. But it would be in your best interest not to see it at all."

"I don't care what the baby looks like. He is part of me and he needs a mother's care more than being tossed away into an institution. I want to hold it in my arms, right now!"

"As you wish. But after seeing it, I am sure you'll change your mind." The nurse disappeared, and shortly returned holding a bundle in her arms.

What lay now in Elena's lap was a lobster-red mass of flesh, rounded like Humpty-Dumpty, with no hands or feet. No, she was wrong. There were two tiny feet, with no thighs, that seemed to grow out of the rounded stomach, covered with long black hair, like the body of an orangutan. Where hands were supposed to be, Elena saw two atrophied wing-like limbs that had tiny little fingers grown from them. Not five, but six fingers. The head was attached to the rounded stomach without a neck and it was bald like a shiny marble, but the red flesh everywhere else was covered with a thick layer of hair that made him look like a wild beast. The baby's face was wrinkled and it looked like an old man. It had deformed cleft lips and as he opened a big orifice ready to cry, there were three big teeth gaping at her. Newborns are not supposed to have teeth, she thought. The nurse was right. This was not a human baby!

"Don't worry," the nurse broke the silence. "Tomorrow you'll go home as if nothing ever happened. We'll take care of the rest."

“What are you going to do with it?”

“We’ll keep it alive as long as we can in an institution. As a ward of the state, he might be eligible for some posthumous research.”

The little monster, as if he understood, flapped around his wing-like arms, found his mother’s pinkie and his tiny fingers wrapped around and clutched with desperation. Elena’s heart filled with compassion.

“I’ll keep the baby,” she replied. “And now, leave us alone for a while.”

As soon as the nurse closed the door behind Elena jumped out of bed, got dressed and snuck out of the room with the little bundle in her arms. She crouched down in the hallway in order to pass the nursing station and leave the hospital without being seen. No, her baby wasn’t going to be discarded like a piece of meat to conduct experiments on. “Over my dead body!” she thought.

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Life with her special son was much harder than what Elena had anticipated. She had a small family inheritance that provided some temporary financial security. Since going out or dating was out of question, she devoted her time to home-school her handicapped child and was amazed of how bright her little one turned out to be. By age three he had the vocabulary of a fifth-grader, and he could write, and spell. Despite his slight speech impediment due to his cleft palate, the child’s rich vocabulary was astonishing. To Elena, his wrinkled face, bald head, and hairy body wasn’t repulsive anymore. “My son’s amazing gifts and cheerful disposition largely compensate for his physical deficiencies,” she thought. “It’s such a shame that others cannot see him the way I do.” Together, they often watched films and TV shows made for children, but Elena carefully avoided those that even made mention of “monsters”. Since mirrors were banned from the house her son never saw his own reflection, therefore he just assumed that he looked like all the other little boys on TV or in the rented movies.

One Sunday afternoon, after walking home from the grocery store, Elena found the front door open and her child gone! She ran outside in a panic. Her eyes caught something at the park across the street. A bunch of children were swarming around a rounded object on the floor, beating it with baseball bats and shouting “Kill the monster!”

Elena got hold of a stick and ran across the park to chase away the kids. She scooped up the bloody little mass of flesh and ran back to the safety of her home to bandage up the battered body of her helpless, crippled child. But what could she possibly do to heal his emotional scars? Would this change his kind and trusting nature into one of anger, mistrust or hatred? The outside world was so cruel and unforgiving; he was so vulnerable. And what would happen to him if Elena should die in an accident? Who would protect him or love him? People judge others by their looks; nobody would take the time to discover this handicapped child’s inner beauty. “Nobody but a mother”, she thought, wiping her tears. There was no time for sorrow; she had to be strong.

His squeaky little voice interrupted her thinking.

“Mommy, why did those children beat me up? All I wanted was to play with them. But they ran away from me screaming. Then they came back with baseball bats to hurt me. They called me a monster and they wanted to kill me. Mommy, what’s a monster?”

The word “monster” was banned from Elena’s household, just like mirrors, except for Elena’s bathroom, which she kept the child locked out of. Was she overprotecting him? She feared that tragedy was awaiting him on the other side of her front door, just like today. Keeping him prisoner was the only thing she could do to protect her child. But was it fair to him? Maybe this was the time to start preparing him for life beyond the “gates”?

Elena lifted up his rounded and shriveled up little body, held him against her heart and carried him to her bathroom. Next she asked him to turn around and look at himself in the mirror. As the child turned his head and faced the mirror his eyes grew wide and he pushed a horrific scream. Then he buried his hairy little face into his mother’s shoulder.

“Mommy, what’s that?” he asked still shaking.

“That’s what insensitive people call a ‘monster’,” Elena replied quietly.

“What’s the monster doing in our house?”

“He lives here.”

“How come I’ve never seen him before?”

“Because you’ve never looked in a mirror.”

“But you were there too, and you were holding it like you’re holding me. Mom, I am scared!”

“Scared of what?”

“Of the monster.”

“Why are you scared?”

“Because it looks mean and ugly. He might want to kill me.”

“Are you mean, or a nice little boy?”

“I am nice; you always said so, mommy.”

“Could you kill somebody?”

“Oh, no. I never could do that. You always told me that every life is precious and how much we must respect it.”

“Good. Now do you remember what I also told you about the apples?”

“Yes. A beautiful red apple might be rotten inside, and an ugly apple could be good inside and have the best taste.”

“Yes. The same goes for people. Some people may look beautiful from the outside, but they might be like the rotten apple inside, selfish, heartless and full of hatred for others. On the other hand, some people might look ugly or might be missing an eye or a leg, but they are loving, kind and compassionate to others in their heart. Some might even look as frightening as the little ‘monster’ in my arms that you saw earlier, yet they might be as loving, warm, and intelligent as you are, my precious. Therefore we should never judge people by the way they look. OK?”

“OK, mommy!”

“What if you looked like the little monster in the mirror that you saw earlier? Would it change you? Would it change who you are deep inside?”

“No, it wouldn’t.”

“Could you get to love it, knowing what a good person the monster is inside his heart?”

“I don’t know...maybe.”

Do you want to take a second look at the monster now?”

“NO!”

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It took several more years of patience, love and hard work for Elena to explain to her son who he was, and to make him fully accept himself. Elena often had tears in her eyes realizing the brilliant mind in the slowly-deteriorating crippled body of her son. He couldn’t walk on his own anymore. Being now wheelchair-bound he understood that he had to rely more and more on his mother’s help to survive.

One day he absentmindedly forgot to turn off the stove. It burned near a pile of newspapers that caught a spark and ignited. The fire spread so rapidly that when Elena ran to rescue him, a part of the roof collapsed, knocking her to the floor. She was unconscious but still breathing. Her handicapped son had two choices: Save himself by wheeling himself out the door just a few feet away, or try to save his mom by risking his own life. “I wouldn’t be able to survive without her,” he thought. “Then I’ll just try to save my mom who gave up her whole life to raise me.” And he did.

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Elena opened her eyes on her hospital bed and took a look for the first time at her bright, sunny private room. A handsome blue-eyed stranger sat beside her, holding her hand.

“Who are you?” She asked in a feeble voice.

“My name is Derrick. Derrick Brown. I am one of the firefighters who rescued you,” he smiled with pride. “You’ve been in a coma for three weeks.”

“My son! Where is my son?” she asked in panic.

“There was a charred body in a wheelchair next to you. Unfortunately he didn’t make it. I’m sorry. But somebody somehow pushed you through the door with the help of a charred piece of

lumber. That saved your life.” Derrick bent over her and softly wiped away her tears. “We gave him a decent burial,” he whispered.

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Many years later, Elena contemplated the falling leaves outside her window from her country cottage. It’s been so long since she lost her first child, but she felt his undying love throughout the years. Did he die by accident, or did he choose it deliberately in order to give her back her life? She couldn’t stop thinking about it.

Her husband’s voice called her back to reality, “Elena, children, come to the table. Dinner is ready,”

“Thank you for cooking tonight, Derrick,” she replied.

End

Watch the video of this short story at the authors’ reading event at the PV Peninsula’s library:  
[https://youtu.be/jK\\_8a9dN1fc](https://youtu.be/jK_8a9dN1fc)

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