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opening extract from

Ruby Rogers is a Walking Legend

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CHAPTER 1

There's nothing to be scared of!

I TEXTED YASMIN: *THERE IS SOMETHING EVIL UP IN MY BEDROOM, SO I AM SITTING ON THE STAIRS, POSSIBLY FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.* There was no reply. Her dad is really strict and she has to go to bed early and leave her mobile downstairs. Otherwise we'd probably text each other all night under the bedclothes. And if we could do that, maybe I wouldn't get so scared.

Mum and Dad were watching a wildlife programme.

Joe was up in his room, working. Sometimes he's got loud music on, but tonight it was quiet. Horribly quiet. I'd been on my way upstairs to go to bed when I heard a sound. A sort of rustle. Coming from my bedroom, not Joe's. It wasn't Joe moving about in his room. It was something evil moving about in mine.

My blood went cold. The wildlife programme on TV was making some really weird sounds. Howler monkeys were howling in the depths of the rain-forest. A bird gave a sudden eerie cry. Goosebumps came up on my arms and legs. It had been dark for hours. I hate this time of year.

'I so *love* this time of year!' Yasmin says, kicking the autumn leaves about. 'Hallowe'en and Bonfire Night, and Christmas! And the school play!' Yasmin's playing Princess Jasmine in *Aladdin*: a starring role. I've got a tiny part. It's only a few lines but I'm still nervous. It's ridiculous, I know, being scared of the school play. But I am kind of jumpy this time of year. When I was really little I was even scared of Father Christmas. And most of all I'm scared of the dark.

Nobody must ever know what a scaredy-cat I am, because I'm supposed to be hard and cool. I want to be a gangster when I grow up.

'Ruby!' Mum came out of the sitting room suddenly. So suddenly it made me jump. 'Why aren't you in bed? What are you doing there?'

'I thought I heard a noise upstairs,' I said.

'Don't be silly, love. There's nothing to be afraid of! Up you go!' Mum bustled off to the kitchen and put the kettle on. I followed her. It was so cosy in there. If only I could sleep on the kitchen floor, like a dog in a basket. They could even call me Rover. I wouldn't mind.

'Mum,' I said. 'Please – just come up with me.'

The phone rang. Mum answered it. It was Granny. Mum sat down in a chair, pulled a 'bor-*ing*' face and started to listen. I knew this call would take for ever. Granny talks non-stop about her cat, Horace. Mum was nodding and listening, but she glared at me and pointed fiercely to the clock and then the door.

The message was clear: go to bed or there will be big trouble, possibly involving shouting. Mum can be fierce. When she shouts, sometimes a little bit of spit comes flying out of her mouth. But you mustn't laugh or she gets even crosser.

I went out into the hall. I could hear the adverts on TV. I edged my way into the sitting room. Dad had his sock off and was examining his big toe.

'Dad,' I said, 'please could you take me up to bed? I'm scared.'

'*You're* scared?' said Dad. 'I think I'm getting arthritis in my big toe. This is a disaster. I'm only forty. My dad didn't get it till he was sixty. This is so unfair.'

He did go upstairs with me, though. We went into my bedroom and he switched the main light on. It looked completely normal. Dad sat down on my little stool and put his sock back on again.

'Off you go to bed, then,' he said.

'But I haven't done my teeth or got my pyjamas on yet,' I said.

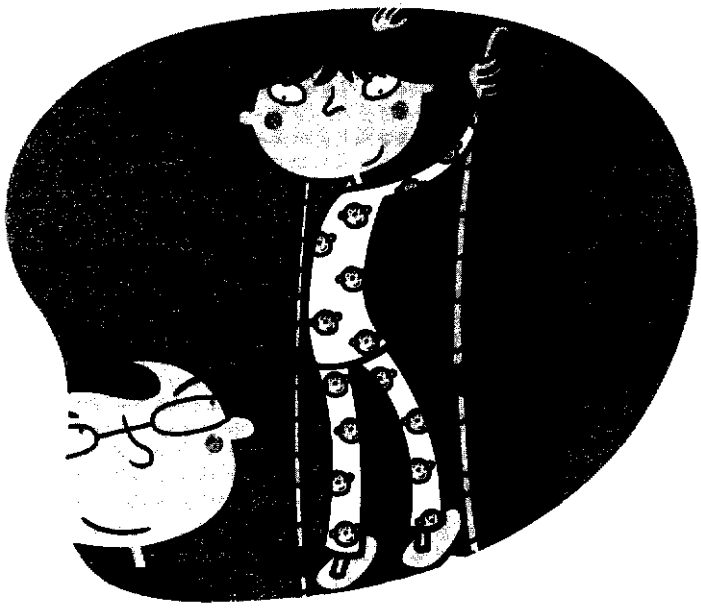
'Well, get a move on,' said Dad. 'I want to get back to the howler monkeys.'

He picked up one of my *Harry Potter* books and started to read it. I raced to the bathroom, did my teeth and dived into my PJs.

Then I rushed back to my room. Dad pulled a face at the *Harry Potter* book and put it back on the shelf.

'No wonder you're a bag of nerves,' he said. 'I've only been reading it for two minutes and I'm scared to death.'

'Dad!' I said. 'You shouldn't say things like that! Dads should be calm and reassuring.'



'Sorry,' said Dad. 'I forgot. Now, up you go to bed, Rube. Giss a kiss – I'm not climbing up that contraption. I've got no head for heights.'

I gave Dad a kiss and a hug, and then climbed up my stepladder to my tree-house platform, where I sleep. It's the most fantastic thing. All my friends are *so* envious of me having a tree house in my bedroom and sleeping up in the branches instead of in a boring ordinary bed.

My monkeys were already in bed, and they got a bit grumpy when I grabbed the best pillow. They're supposed to be my toys, but sometimes they behave as if they own the place.

'Night-night then, lovey!' said Dad, standing by the door. He switched the light off.

'Night, Dad!' Dad closed the door and went downstairs. For an instant everything seemed pitch black. But then my eyes got used to the dark, and the shape of the window became clear with the streetlights shining in through the curtains.

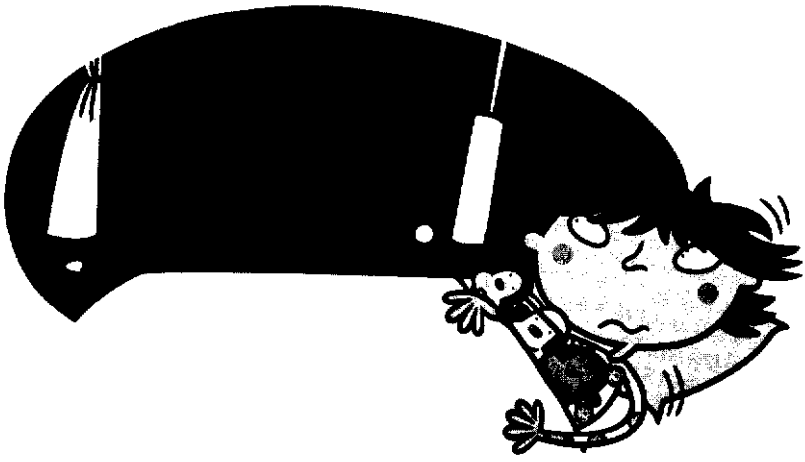
I closed my eyes and started to try to get to sleep. But I felt wide awake. I thought I heard stealthy footsteps: *tread, tread, tread.* Then I realised it was my own pulse beating in my ear. I sat up and punched the pillows a bit, trying to get more comfortable.

'For cryin' out loud!' said Stinker (he's the boss monkey). 'Give us a break!'

I lay down again. I closed my eyes. I tried to count sheep. Then I tried to count monkeys.

Then I heard it: *breathing.* Instantly my whole body tensed. Maybe it was my own breathing. I held my breath. The breathing went on and on. Big, heavy breaths – the sort of breathing a monster would do. I wasn't imagining it! There *was* something evil in my room!

I was just about to scream for help, when I heard another sound. A faint scratching and a horrible, blood-curdling moan . . . and it was definitely coming from my wardrobe!



CHAPTER 2

You're an evil monster!

I SAT BOLT UPRIGHT, my pulse racing. The wardrobe door twitched for a split second. Then, very, very slowly, it *swung open.*

Had the door just opened by itself, sort of by accident? Had it not been closed properly? (When did I ever close it properly?) Oh, why hadn't Mum come upstairs with me? Mum would have insisted on hanging my clothes up in the wardrobe. Dad hadn't even noticed where I'd chucked them.

If only I'd hung my clothes up just now, I'd

know for sure that there was absolutely nobody and nothing in the wardrobe.

The door still hung open. There was silence. My heartbeat began to slow. Maybe it was just one of those odd spooky moments after all, when objects seem to do weird stuff on their own.

Then, slowly, and with a terrible quietness, a figure *stepped out of the wardrobe.* It was a hunched figure, short and stocky, and in the darkness it looked as if it had no head. *No head!* I opened my mouth to scream, but no sound came out. I was paralysed, like in a bad dream.

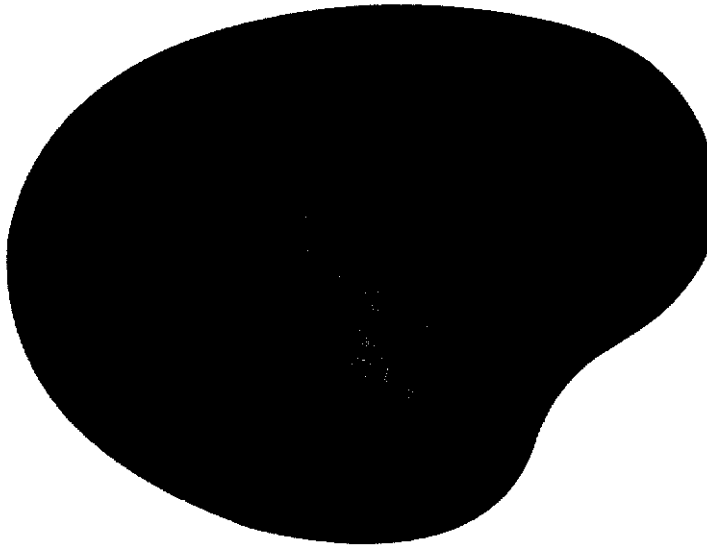


Some kind of sickening dwarf! A horrible monsterish thing was actually *in my bedroom.* It must be a dream, it must be a dream! I stretched my eyes wide, the way I always do when I know I'm having a nightmare and want to wake up. But it didn't work. I was wide awake – and the thing was really there, creeping in a hideous way towards the foot of my ladder!

Then, suddenly, I noticed something. I could smell Joe's aftershave. Since he started going out with the irritating Tiffany, Joe's been splashing something called Stag all over his neck every evening – even though he only shaves once a week. This horrible headless monster had got to be Joe! Typical!

My terror changed into fury. I hated him for this. He had scared me half to death. And now he was climbing up the ladder to my private tree house! Climbing up in an evil way, in his stockinged feet, with his fleece pulled up right over his head so he looked like a Headless Horror!

Swiftly I looked around for something to hit him with. Just to the side of my mattress there's a little built-in shelf for books and stuff. And there was a big glass of water. I grabbed it, and just as the Joe-monster reached the top of the ladder, I hurled



the water down inside the open neck of the fleece.

'Aaaargh!' spluttered the Joe-monster. I reached down inside the neck of the fleece and grabbed a handful of his wet hair. I pulled with all my might. 'Owwwwww!' roared Joe. He lashed out wildly to try and make me let go, but of course, with his head buried deep in his fleece, he couldn't see. He lost his balance and fell off the ladder on to the floor.

There was a terrific thud. The room actually *shook*. I jumped down the ladder, grabbed my tennis racket and let Joe have what he deserved: forehand, backhand, volley. Joe struggled to his feet, roaring, his head still buried.

'Cut it out!' yelled Joe, staggering about and trying to get his head out of his fleece.

'Why should I?' I yelled, whacking him with all my strength. 'You're an evil monster!'

Joe managed to unzip the neck of his fleece and his head popped out. He grabbed the tennis racket, half-breaking my wrist. I screamed.

The door flew open and the light snapped on. Mum stood there, her eyes flashing.

'What's going on?' she shouted. 'For goodness's sake! The ceiling's shaking down in the room below!'

'Joe hid in my wardrobe!' I yelled. 'He waited till my light was out, then he came out and scared me! He was disguised as a horrible headless monster!'

'Joe, get out!' snapped Mum, taking the tennis racket off him.

Joe slithered passed her. He hissed briefly at me as he went, like a snake. This is his usual way of saying, 'You're a sneak!' I ignored him.

Mum closed the door behind him and propped the tennis racket up by the wall.

'Get up that ladder to bed!' she said grumpily.

'There's no need to be cross with me!' My temper flared again. 'I just went to bed and he was hiding in my wardrobe all the time! Disguised as an evil headless monster!'

'Don't exaggerate, Ruby,' said Mum, looking tired. 'He looked perfectly normal.'

'He had his fleece pulled up over his head!' I said. 'He was like a headless ghost or something!'

Mum smiled. Normally I'd be pleased if she smiled. But this time it was infuriating. It seemed as if she was on Joe's side, enjoying his joke.

'He frightened me to death!' I screamed, climbing up my ladder. 'You don't care! You just think it's funny! It wasn't! It was horrible! It was the most horrible moment of my life!'

'Calm down, now, Ruby,' said Mum. 'Give me a kiss.' She climbed up the ladder a bit.

'No!' I said, throwing myself down on the mattress and pulling up the duvet round my shoulders. I lay out of reach, with my face turned away from Mum. 'Joe plays a horrible evil trick on me, and all you can do is laugh! Go away!'

There was a pause, and then Mum went down the ladder again. She walked to the door.

'I'm going to give him a severe talking to, right now,' she said softly. 'Now you get some sleep, or you'll be too tired for school in the morning.'

'That's all I ever wanted to do anyway!' I snapped. 'How am I ever going to get to sleep after that? I'll have nightmares!'

'Shall I leave the light on, then?' asked Mum.

'Do what you like! I don't care!' I yelled, and pulled the bedclothes up right over my head.

Mum left the light on and shut the door. I heard her going to Joe's room next door, and the sound of voices. Mum didn't sound nearly angry enough with him. He's the favourite. I know he is. Everybody loves him, and nobody loves me.

I clutched my monkeys in my arms and tried to cry. I managed a few tears, but then Stinker started to fidget.

'Hey!' he complained. 'A guy can't breathe like dis! Give us some air, can'tcha?' I loosened my grip.

'Dat's better,' said Stinker. 'And stop ya caterwauling. Don't get sad, get even!'

Stinker was right. Tears were for sissies. What I needed wasn't a cry. It was *revenge*.