
Mats Strandberg
FRANK
the
MONSTER
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GECKO PRESS

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FRANK *the* MONSTER



Translated by Julia Marshall

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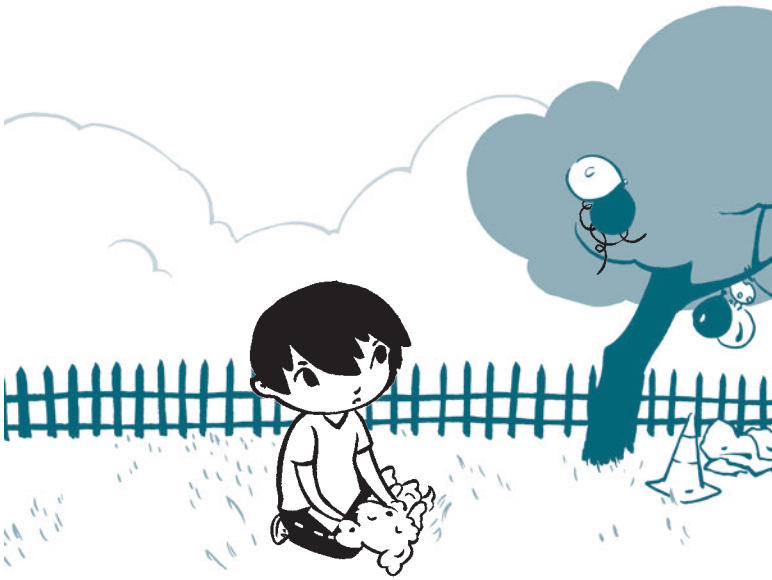
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On my ninth birthday, I turned into a monster. I just didn't know it at the time.

My name is Frank Steen and the monster thing happened at my birthday party, in the garden.

My family lives in an ordinary little house in an ordinary little town called Yrred. Up till then, I'd never had a real secret. Maybe that was because I had no friends to share secrets with.

I told myself that I had books instead. They were sort of friends. Maybe even better.



Nothing in real life is half as exciting as what happens in books. At least that's what I thought before I turned nine.

My mother, Mary, had baked an enormous, hideous cake in a roasting dish, and she'd strung up balloons. My dad, Shel, had set things up for the sort of games he'd liked when he was a boy, like sack races.



"This'll be fun, Frank," he kept saying. "Don't you think?"

I had to say yes so Dad wouldn't feel bad.

In fact, the games were way too sporty for me. Dad forgets that not everyone can be like him and Oliver, who think sports are the most important thing in the whole world. Oliver is my little brother and also the most annoying

person in the history of the universe.

As it turned out, I didn't have to play the games. Practically no one came to my party. Just my parents and Oliver. And Alice, who lived next door, and her dog Woof. But no one from my class came, even though my mother had sent invitations to everyone. The sacks lay on the lawn, empty and unused.

The worst thing was that my parents felt sorry for me and tried way too hard to hide it.

My mother kept saying that "everyone would have loved to come, but it's hard in summer, so many people are away," blah blah blah. As if I'd believe it.

Oliver just smirked and rolled his eyes, because he got it. He had tons of friends. He talked to them all the time. They were always knocking on the door wanting him to come and play.



Alice just sat quietly and smiled at me as if she knew exactly what I was feeling. She often did that. Her smile made me think I loved Alice. But I kept that quiet. It would be too embarrassing to say out loud. We weren't related or anything, she just happened to live next door.

Her dog, Woof, was as happy as ever. Alice said Woof was the world's worst guard dog and that was probably true. Woof liked *everybody*. He'd run up to anyone and roll onto his back, desperate to have his belly scratched.

I don't know what breed Woof was, but he was very fluffy. His fur was so thick you could dig your fingers into his soft coat as far as you wanted. They say all dogs are descended from wolves, but it was hard to believe that looking at Woof.

I asked Alice if I could give him some cake, and I was allowed. I took quite a big piece and held it out. Woof was so excited he bit my finger. One single drop of blood came out. That one red dot spread all through the icing.
My finger didn't hurt but Alice looked really worried.

"It's nothing," I said. "Promise."



I felt more sorry for Woof. He didn't mean to bite me, I knew that. His ears drooped and he hung his head. He looked ashamed.

I gave my finger a wash and then I forgot about it. I didn't know that my whole life had just changed. I had no idea that a secret world existed, and that I was about to discover it.

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EVEN A MONSTER NEEDS FRIENDS

It was easy to imagine things in the shadows of my bedroom at night. Someone in the wardrobe who'd opened the door a crack. Maybe a vampire with freshly sharpened teeth. A terrible, rotten face staring in through the window, looking straight at me, licking its lips.

I hated the dark and the night. Why did they even exist? Every time the sun sank behind the trees at dusk, something sank inside me too.

I tried to convince myself there was no such thing as monsters. If only I knew how wrong I was!



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