

The Christmas Monster

It was Christmas Eve and Duncan was trying very hard to be good but he was bored, yawning his head off and fidgeting in his chair. Every year his mother had a Christmas party for her sisters and unfortunately for Duncan, this meant that all his cousins came too. Every year, Duncan tried his hardest to get out of going to the party. Only that morning, his mother had calmly wiped off 'chicken pox' spots that he had dotted on his forehead with one of her bright red lipsticks. Last year, when he complained of having a fever, she had simply turned off the heating until he was so cold, that he'd had to beg her to turn it back on again. Duncan lives in England you see, where it's cold at Christmas.

Duncan didn't even want to look at his cousins, let alone talk to them, because they all had the misfortune in his eyes, to be girls. No one was paying any attention to him whatsoever, apart from Aunty Louise. She was the reason why he had so many girl cousins. She had always wanted a boy, but ended up with four girls instead. Duncan could not think of anything worse (although we might suggest four boys). The conversation always went something like this:

"Hello Duncan"

"Hello Aunty Louise"

"You've grown since I last saw you!"

"Yup"

"And how is school?"

"Ok"

"Um, and are you looking forward to Christmas?"

"Suppose so"

And so on...

If Aunty Louise had really wanted to talk to Duncan, she would have had a hard job of it. Even if she had surprised him and said "So, tell me who is your favourite character in the Harry Potter movies?" or "What's the highest score you've had on 'Skulls dungeon' video game?" He would have refused to talk to her on principle.

Principles are different to principals, who teach at schools. Principles are idea-things which don't bend very much and are like rulers, because you can measure things up against them. The principle here is never talk to boring Aunties, even if they get interesting, because otherwise you'll be a girl.

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Duncan yawned, checked his watch for the hundredth time and squirmed in his seat at the dining room table where they were all having lunch. He wished he could just go and flop on the sofa. Just when the jumpy ants-in-his-pants feeling meant he would have to leap out of his seat at any moment, there was a bustle of people rising from the table and a clearing of plates and glasses. They were bringing out the cakes! Now this was more like it.

Duncan picked up a mince pie dusted in icing sugar, and his mother dolloped a big splodge of cream on top. But just as he was about to demolish the little fruit pie with his spoon, he saw something which made him blink twice and shake his head in disbelief. Staring up at him, from a little hole in the top of the mince pie, was a tiny red face waving frantically at him with all his tiny might.

Duncan jumped and yelped out loud. His mother asked him if everything was alright, he mumbled that everything was fine. She wondered if maybe he was coming down with chicken pox after all, because he suddenly looked very pale.

He quickly looked around at the girl cousins, hoping they had not seen anything, but luckily they were still ignoring him. No doubt they thought he was boring too.

Slowly, he picked up his spoon again, and looked down at the mince pie. It looked like just an ordinary mince pie again, with pastry and dried fruit, but definitely nothing else, which is the way it should be when you are about to eat a mince pie. No hidden extras. Duncan thought he must have been dreaming, and half laughed to himself, but just as he went to dig in with his spoon again, there was a small shrill yelp, and a little streak of red light zoomed out of the pie, flew frantically around the room, and then landed on the Christmas tree.

“What are you looking at Duncan?” asked his mother, beginning to seriously wonder about him. “Are you sure you’re feeling okay?”

Duncan was too distracted to reply, and wished she would leave him alone, because suddenly the day had got very interesting. He was now wide awake, and ready for action, he was going to have an adventure! You see, you never know when an adventure will arrive.

Out of the corner of his eye he could see the tiny red light glimmering on the Christmas tree. In fact Duncan was positive that the red dot was shaking, rather than glimmering. When everyone was cradling their cups of coffee in their hands and the little girls were lost in some silly make believe world where dolls were real, Duncan decided it was time for action.

All adventurers need tools, so he picked up his fork, and carefully slid it into his pocket when his mother was not looking, then he folded up one of the large Christmas napkins into a hat. His mother saw him and said ‘Oh look, isn’t that sweet, Duncan is making a hat from the napkins’.

The girls looked up at him in faint surprise, clearly this had scored some brownie points in their books, but he was not interested in their admiration, he had only one thought, what was that red thing hiding on the Christmas tree?

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Armed with his fork and napkin, he excused himself from the table saying he wanted to look at the Christmas tree (again earning a look of interest from the girls, who all considered for a moment coming with him to look at the beautiful decorations, Duncan had to make some boy grunting noises to put them off).

Casually he walked over to the tree, there it was, the little red light. It was shaking away on the tree, trying to pretend it was not there, which was stupid thought Duncan, as quite clearly it was and if the little red thing thought pretending to be a Christmas decoration was going to save it, then it had better think again. Duncan would take no prisoners.

He carefully held out the napkin shaped as a hat and aimed for the red quivering light on the tree. Very slowly he inched closer until WHAM, he dived onto the tree, with both hands, a bit like when you score a try on the rugby field, and trapped the red light inside.

He shouted out in triumph about the same time as everyone in the room screamed together in perfect unison.

“Duncan, what on EARTH are you doing!?”

Of course they did not really shout the same words at exactly the same time, but it felt like they did; it was probably just his mother’s voice that he heard, as suddenly everyone was talking and exclaiming to each other very loudly but a mother’s voice has the amazing ability to cut through time and space and freeze you on the spot.

Duncan was still holding onto the napkin with all his might; he could feel something bouncing around inside, and every now and then little sharp pin pricks went into his hands, as if the tiny red thing was sticking a miniature sword through the fabric into Duncan’s skin.

It was only then that he realized what a mess he was in. The Christmas tree had fallen over and decorations were scattered all over the floor.

There was pandemonium, which is a great word that means a wild uproar! To his dismay, one of the young girls came over and grabbed the napkin out of his hands.

“You horrible boy!” she screamed at him, reminding Duncan once again about why he hated girls “You have roo-need (she meant to say ruined) the Christmas tree!”

She threw the napkin at his face, just in time for him to see a flash of tiny red, as the little creature escaped. He had only a split second but he was pretty sure it went inside one of the Christmas presents, which were now all over the floor, like footballs that had been kicked in different directions at football practice.

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He was deaf to the noise and fuss around him, which mainly consisted of his mother apologizing approximately a thousand times to his aunties, and his aunties all pretending that it was nothing, when really the Christmas tree falling over was a pretty big deal.

Duncan decided some 'damage control' was in order, that's when you pretend that you didn't realize what you were doing and try to help fix the mess you have caused. It is usually a pretty good idea if you have caused the mess. But first he made sure the Christmas gift with the tiny red creature inside, was kicked under the sofa. He knew where it was, he'd get that little red thing, and it was not over yet!

After he had been a good boy and said sorry and helped clear up the mess, which is a boring part of the story we can skip, Duncan had to wait a long time for people to settle down again, but finally fresh cups of coffee and some shortbread biscuits were brought out, and everyone was ignoring him once more.

The Christmas tree was now very disheveled and if it could have scowled at Duncan, I am sure it would have done so. Imagine how you would feel if you had gone out to a party in your best clothes, but then a wild wind had blown you all over the park and dumped you in a puddle. Well we can be sure the Christmas tree was feeling the same way, when Duncan came over to search for the Christmas monster, which is what Duncan had decided to call the red quivering thing. I think that's a great name for it, until we can come up with something better for a strange little red creature that flies around the room, hides in mince pies and shakes its little red fist at you. We need to get a closer look at it and ask it a few questions, like 'what is your name?' and 'what school do you go to?' and 'where do you live?', before we can know much about it.

Duncan's mother had tidied up the Christmas presents (although with her cheeks bright red and angry looks at Duncan every now and then, we can safely say that the Christmas spirit of gift giving was not on her mind). The gift that the Christmas monster had dived into, was now no longer under the sofa, but at the very back of the pile of Christmas presents. It is a strange rule in life, that what we want is often a bit tricky to get. It would have been much easier if the present had been right at the front but it was as far from Duncan as it is possible for a gift in a pile of presents to be.

Duncan sat down, he needed a strategy. A strategy is a fabulous idea about how you are going to do something. He decided to wait until everyone was looking in the other direction so he could grab the Christmas present and run into the other room with it. The problem with this plan is that people tend to look in lots of different directions, and just when you get two people looking away from you, another two, are suddenly studying the picture right above your head. Admittedly it was not a very good plan but if you can think of a better one, we'll tell Duncan to try it your way next time.

He could see the gift wrapped in bright blue paper with silver stars all over it, and a hole which the little imp had left in the side when it had dived into the gift. Duncan tried to pretend he was yawning and stretched his arms out but no matter how hard Duncan stretched, the gift was just out of reach. Every now and then, a little red face appeared, quickly peeked out and then when it saw Duncan, it disappeared, quick as a lightning flash.

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Maybe the Christmas monster was hopeless at staying still? I know that most girls love sitting still, they can play all day with one doll or read a book, whereas most boys want to run around all day. I think we can safely say that it is a boy Christmas monster, not a girl. A little girl Christmas monster, would very sensibly have sat in the corner of the box and read a book, until Duncan had fallen asleep from boredom.

“Shall we let the children open their presents now?” said a very sensible Aunty. Everyone had finally forgotten about Duncan and the disaster with the Christmas tree, so there were happy cries of ‘Yes, let’s open the presents’ from all the girls. Then the doorbell rang. Everyone was distracted. Duncan snatched the gift up and hid it behind his back. His mother went to answer the door and at the same time the girls all ran towards the Christmas presents.

Duncan then had another of those split seconds to make a decision, to run or not to run? He decided to remain where he was, and hope no one noticed he had a bright blue Christmas present, hidden behind his back.

“Muuuum! Duncan has one of the Christmas presents” cried a very annoying little girl, in a voice that was a hundred times more irritating than your voice or mine, and was definitely not someone you wanted to come along with you, when you were doing something naughty. Duncan had decided she would be perfect for target practice.

Luckily, his own mother was busy at the front door. A young girl was there, asking if anyone had seen her pet mouse which was missing. Duncan, despite having a hoard of girls now pressing him into a corner and demanding that he give back the gift, was curious about the girl at the front door. Something about her seemed familiar. She had bright blue eyes and long brown hair, but Duncan would not notice that for another five years, at a birthday party in actual fact. Today he was more interested in why she was carrying a fishing net, a jar and an advent calendar, one of those Christmas countdown things, with little windows and chocolate treats.

He suddenly realized why she looked familiar. There was a desperate, frantic look on her face (like when are playing hide and seek and your sister has got down to counting 3, 2, 1 and you can only think of the curtains to hide behind). Duncan was pretty sure, the same look had been on his face ever since he had seen the Christmas monster, who we really must get back to by the way, otherwise he might think we’ve forgotten all about him. With a flash of insight, which is when you understand something without anyone explaining it to you, Duncan realized that she was looking for the Christmas monster, HIS Christmas monster.

Just at that moment, one of the girls grabbed the box from Duncan. He gasped in horror.

“What are you doing? That’s my present!”

“No, it’s not! It’s mine.”

And they started a tug of war, over the bright blue Christmas gift.

“It’s mine!”

“It’s mine!”

“Give it to me”

“No, give it to me!”

And then, a popping sound, a flash of red light, and a tiny chuckling noise as if the Christmas monster thought something was very funny as he popped out of the Christmas gift, and flew around the room a few times. This really got the attention of the grown ups by the way, who started to scream and look confused or maybe a bit dazed.

The girl at the door, who was called Jessica, cried out.

“There’s my mouse!”

Hoping no one would pay any attention to the fact that if it was a mouse, it was clearly a flying mouse and a red one at that! She had obviously not thought things through very carefully, but what can you say when you are chasing a strange little red being that flies and pokes fun at you and seems to enjoy hiding in the strangest of places?

Jessica pushed past Duncan’s mother and ran into the house, with her fishing net waving in the air and her jar at the ready. Duncan was secretly impressed with the fact that she had both a jar and fishing net, now they were in business.

One of the Aunties cried out that there was a red moth and that she hated moths and promptly started screaming. When you are frightened of something, you just have to screech your head off, otherwise there is no point whatsoever in being scared of anything.

“Don’t worry, Aunty Helen, we’ll catch him!” shouted Duncan.

Duncan’s mother suddenly felt very sorry for herself, she flopped down on a chair and stared blankly at a wall. Her guests were running around her living room trying to catch a red flying creature which quite clearly was not a moth, but if it had been a flying red elephant, she would have simply asked it to close the door behind it, when it had finished ruining her Christmas party.

Duncan and Jessica chased the little red creature all around the house, but the Christmas monster was so fast, that every time they got close, it whizzed off again in a totally different direction. They were making some admirable attempts to catch it. Once Jessica crept up slowly behind the Christmas monster, when it was perched on a Christmas angel by the fireplace, but when her fishing net came down, all she caught was an angel with its head snapped off. Duncan was balancing on a chair at one point, and then in just a jump, a hop and a twist, he was by the Christmas tree with his hands grabbing

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at thin air! Jessica was surprised by how fast Duncan moved and wondered if she had dismissed him too soon as that 'dull boy a few doors down the road'.

Jessica had found the Christmas monster in her advent calendar that morning (around the same time Duncan was pretending to have chicken pox). She had opened up the advent window for that day, expecting to find a tiny chocolate behind the door but instead had found a tiny creature. He quite clearly had eaten her tiny chocolate as he was sitting there half asleep with a swollen belly. This was why Jessica was able to trap him in her hands for a few seconds, and take a good look at him. She does not recommend catching a Christmas monster in your hands though, as it stabbed its little sword into her skin so many times, she had to let it go.

Much later, when everything to do with Christmas was over, Jessica drew a picture of the Christmas monster and showed it to Duncan. I thought you would like to see it too, so here it is (Jessica said she does not mind my showing you, as long as you promise not to laugh at her drawing). Duncan argued the sword was really a trident, which has three sharp bits, but they have agreed to disagree on this, which means that they think the other person has no idea what they are talking about, but they are not going to say it to their face

Maybe the Christmas monster became tired of zooming around the living room like a tiny red fighter plane, with lumbering giants chasing him, because he suddenly sped off down the hallway, no doubt in search of some peace and quiet. Jessica and Duncan ran after him, and followed him into a study at the end of the hallway.

The study was very quiet, and the noise of the adults and children seemed far away. Duncan and Jessica looked at each other.

"Hullo" said Duncan.

"Hello" said Jessica.

"Did you see it?"

"Yes"

"For how long?"

"A few seconds, then it escaped."

Duncan nodded wisely, as if he had expected this.

He liked the fact she got straight to the point, did not beat around the bush, cut to the chase, all of which meant she would not make a very good story teller, but was great to have in an emergency.

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“Do you think it’s in here?” Jessica looked around the room, squinting her eyes up, trying to see into the shadows.

“If it is, it will be hiding, it always hides.”

“Where could it hide in here?”

They looked around the room; a bookcase, a table with papers all over it, a filing cabinet, a waste paper bin, an old lounge with lots of cushions and dark corners where coins, sweets and buttons could fall behind. It was not looking good. To make matters worse, unwrapped Christmas presents were all over the floor, with shopping bags, receipts, Christmas cards and long rolls of sparkling Christmas paper. It would take a long time to search the room.

Maybe you have worked out though, that if the Christmas monster was hiding anywhere in the room, it must be hiding in either the box of Christmas cards or down a tube of Christmas wrapping paper.

The tiny creature was clearly the world’s biggest fan of ‘hide and seek’ but it was not very good at playing the game. He could have built a teeny tiny home for himself down the side of the sofa and lived there quite happily for generations with his wife, children and grandchildren. He would never have been vacuumed away by Duncan’s mother, because no one vacuums down the side of sofas anymore. In the olden days, they used to do something called spring-cleaning, when the entire house is cleaned, curtains are washed, drawers are emptied out and cushions taken off sofas. Then a vacuum nozzle is stuck down the back of the sofa and there is this great suction noise as all sorts of bits and bobs rush up the tube and you have no idea if you have just sucked up a valuable piece of lost jewellery or some coins you had left over from Italy, with chewing gum stuck all over them.

I am sure you are not interested in spring cleaning, although if you want to earn extra pocket money it comes in very handy. Just tell your parents that you will clean six cupboards, or wash all the windows for \$x price, and make ‘x’ whatever you think your time is worth. The only drawback to this business plan is that you must then clean six cupboards or wash all the windows.

What we are really interested in though is the Christmas monster, who to be honest, has become fed up with being forgotten about and is in a sulk. How would you like to be in a story and then when everyone is meant to be searching high and low for you, someone starts talking about vacuuming?

Duncan and Jessica however had not forgotten about the Christmas monster. They were sitting quietly on the couch, hoping that if they kept very still, the Christmas monster would think it was safe to come out. Jessica said that if they kept searching, then it would just fly away again every time they found it, but if they waited long enough, the Christmas monster might come to them instead?

It was difficult to sit still, especially when Duncan’s mind was whirring with all sorts of noisy ideas and difficult questions. He wanted to shout at the top of his voice “This is crazy, we are chasing a tiny red monster around the house!” but he had to restrain himself, and be quiet.

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Jessica was sitting like a statue (as we've said before, girls are much better at sitting still), but Jessica took it to a whole new level. She was so still, that Duncan wondered if she was even breathing. He carefully leaned towards her, very slowly so as not to make a noise, and was staring at her chest trying to see the rise and fall of her breathing, when she kicked him and glared at him. She kicked him without making a noise however, and once again he had to admit she was impressive.

They continued to wait. Duncan had no idea where the Christmas monster was, so he just stared glumly at the carpet, feeling a bit useless. What if it never came out of hiding? They might have to wait for years, Christmas might come and go, and they would still be sitting on the couch, and a lot thinner than before, because they would have missed all the Christmas turkey and roast potatoes and cranberry sauce and trifle and chocolates and shortbread biscuits.

Luckily for Duncan, the Christmas monster was not very good at waiting either, and after Duncan and Jessica had been sitting still for five interminably long minutes (in other words, it felt like an hour), the Christmas monster decided it was safe to come out. His little arms were aching because he had been clinging to the top of a roll of Christmas wrapping paper. Finally he let go and had the best slide of his life whooshing down the roll of wrapping paper, shooting out of the bottom and bumping across the carpet, to arrive right in front of Duncan's left foot.

Now Duncan really could not move, seeing the tiny little creature out in the open, just sitting by his foot, totally oblivious of him and Jessica, made him feel as if he was frozen to the spot. Duncan worried that if he even breathed, it would fly away again. He dared not look at Jessica, but she was equally mesmerized. The fishing net lay idle in her hands, all thoughts of catching the Christmas monster had vanished, she just wanted to watch it and see what it would do.

The tiny creature sat behind Duncan's shoe and sighed. I think it is safe to say that the Christmas monster needs glasses, because he thought Duncan's shoe was a wall and the much larger objects of Duncan and Jessica, trembling with excitement sitting on the edge of the couch, were just great big blue blobs (Duncan and Jessica were both wearing blue that day, something they often wondered at later in life, but we could tell them that no, it was of no significance whatsoever).

The Christmas monster took off his little red hat, throwing it carelessly to the ground, the way you do after a long day and kicked off his tiny boots (which by the way, had glitter all over them). Then to Duncan and Jessica's dismay, the Christmas monster started crying. Not just a few tears, but really crying, sobbing his little heart out and then out came a box of minuscule red tissues and he blew his nose on about half a box of them, and threw them away, so there were all these tiny red dots all around Duncan's feet.

With all the honking and blowing on tissues, it was hard not to notice that the Christmas monster had a pointy little nose, he could have used it to punch holes in paper if he'd wanted to. It did not add to his level of attractiveness, we will politely say. As if this was not bad enough, his tiny red hair stuck out in all directions, with a texture resembling something very close to wool.

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Jessica thought the most beautiful thing about the Christmas monster though, was a tiny pair of iridescent, shimmering wings, humming and whirring on his back. Maybe he was a long lost descendant of the humming bird, Jessica wondered; feeling rather grown up as she contemplated this and making a mental note to ask her Biology teacher, who had just taught them all about natural evolution.

The tiny red impish creature sat there and cried. By this time though, Jessica was starting to come to her senses and was slowly reaching for her net. Yes, she wanted to find out why it was crying but she could do that much better, when it was captured and her pet forever and ever. She wanted to put it in a golden cage with tinsel all over it, to make it feel at home and maybe have some mince pies and an empty advent calendar in the corner, but she definitely wanted to trap it and never let it go, ever, ever again.

Duncan was also starting to think about doing something, and sensing that suddenly Jessica was not to be trusted. In the final reckoning, it was each boy or girl to his own. Whoever caught the Christmas monster would get to keep him, and probably become famous world-wide as a result. Neither of them thought about the impact on their youth and innocence of being catapulted to the heights of fame, let alone the impact on the Christmas monster of a thousand flash lights and his very own fan club.

Duncan and Jessica suddenly heard voices in the corridor and his father saying,

“They are in my study are they? Well, I’ll soon find out what’s going on!”

Jessica moved like lightening, sensing the perfect moment to strike whilst Duncan was distracted by the sound of his father’s voice. She brought her fishing net right down on top of the Christmas monster and to her amazement, she actually caught him. The tiny Christmas monster could be seen tumbling around inside the net.

Duncan coming to his senses ran to the door and jammed a chair under the door handle to delay his father.

“We’ve got it! “We’ve got it!”

They hugged and jumped around like two footballers who had just scored the winning goal, with Jessica keeping her hand firmly on the top of the net to stop the Christmas monster from escaping.

In all their whooping and jumping, they did not notice a most unexpected thing. Inside the fishing net was the Christmas monster, with one little foot twisted in a painful way, and his face pressed up against the net but suddenly, flying around outside the net, was another tiny red creature. This one was identical to our Christmas monster except it was wearing a skirt, so we can safely say it was a girl Christmas monster.

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With her long red hair flying out in all directions, and her tiny wings whirring like a humming bird's, she was frantically flying around the net, slashing at it with a pair of scissors (the girls obviously had scissors not tridents like the boys). She was clearly looking for a chance to cut a hole in the net and pull the Christmas monster out.

“Open this door Duncan!” shouted his frustrated father on the other side of the door.

In that moment, the tiny girl Christmas monster cut through the fishing net, grabbed the Christmas monster with one hand and yanked him out. Then in a flash of red sparkle-dust, they both vanished into thin air.

“Oh no!” Jessica gasped in horror.

She had seen the red flash out of the corner of her eye.

“What?” shouted Duncan, his smile fading fast.

Jessica lifted up the net in front of his face. Duncan peered into it. The net was empty with a hole at the bottom.

The two children suddenly felt like two deflated balloons, which is pretty flat. Jessica wondered if air could whoosh out of human beings, in the same way it does with balloons.

“What’s going on? This is all very mysterious!” exclaimed Duncan’s father as the chair gave way, and he finally entered the room.

He was a tall, heavy man, usually of a cheerful disposition, but at that precise moment, he was frowning. There is nothing like having a door blocked by a chair, to make you feel irritable.

“What’s this I hear about Christmas trees being knocked over and someone chasing a mouse and a red moth that’s scaring all the women?”

“Hello, my name is Jessica” said Jessica, who although terribly disappointed at having once again lost the Christmas monster, always remembered her manners. This is a bit depressing for those of us who often forget them.

“Ah yes, of course” said Duncan’s father. “My apologies. I’m Robert, Duncan’s father. You must be Mark Trafford’s daughter? Your family moved into number four a few months ago. Pleased to meet you. Now, can someone please tell me what is going on?”

“Dad!” burst out Duncan, “You won’t BELIEVE what’s happened!”

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We need to point out here that only when nothing else will do, is it acceptable to use CAPITALS in a story. It is much better to use strong adjectives to draw attention to something, for example the pink and purple, spotted cat, you would not fail to notice in a story, but the grey cat you might miss.

Duncan stopped himself just in time. His father would never believe him.

“What? Did Father Christmas himself turn up?” laughed his Dad.

Duncan turned silently away from his father. His shoulders hunched over and he stared blankly at the floor. Jessica put her hand on his shoulder. Theirs was a story that no one should have to share alone.

Luckily, Duncan’s father noticed that whatever his son had seen, it was no laughing matter. He carefully sat down beside his son. Remember when things are serious, you can’t just flop on the sofa, you have to seat yourself in a dignified manner.

“I’m sorry Duncan. I shouldn’t have laughed. What did you see today?” asked his father patiently.

Duncan’s father was a modern dad you see. In children’s stories centuries ago, the father would just have said “I’m glad you’re alright now son” or something along those lines.

“It doesn’t matter, you won’t believe me!” pouted Duncan, which was a bit childish really, as his Dad was genuinely trying to understand, but sometimes, well it’s nice to sulk and feel sorry for ourselves.

“Well, there’s only one way to find out whether I will believe you, and that’s to tell me,” said his Dad encouragingly.

And so Duncan and Jessica told him about the Christmas monster.

His Dad did not know what to think, it seemed very unlikely indeed, but when he took into account a house full of women talking about flying red moths, a rather dazed wife, and the fact that both children were saying the same story but in different ways, he began to wonder himself.

“It’s very strange. Are you sure it was not a caterpillar? Well no, they are not red and they also don’t fly. What about a ladybird? It was in the mince-pie you say? How on earth could it breathe in there!”

“It had a sword thing, with three prongs on the end, which it stuck into my hand.”

Remembered Duncan, feeling nostalgic now at the memory, wishing he was back at that mince pie again, looking down at the Christmas monster. If only he had done things differently.

“Maybe he used it like a snorkeling tube and stuck it up through the mince-pie for air?” Duncan wondered.

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He was starting to feel a sense of excitement again, talking about an adventure was almost as good as being in the middle of one.

“But why if he was so angry, was he crying? It’s very puzzling,” said his father.

The children both shook their heads, they had no answers.

“Well maybe that’s a big clue,” said his Dad thoughtfully. “Think about the times you have been really upset? It’s usually when you are in trouble, or have lost something.”

“What do you mean?” asked Duncan.

“Well, it’s just a theory, but maybe the Christmas monster was lost.”

Duncan and Jessica looked interested.

“But where is he from?” said Jessica.

Duncan’s father was more used to speculating about the stock exchange, than about where tiny red Christmas monsters originated from, but he thought carefully for a while, then feeling rather self-conscious (the way you do in class, when the teacher asks a question and you know your answer is either extremely clever or completely stupid), offered the following suggestion.

“Well it’s just a theory, and we’d have to do some more research to test the idea for validity...”

“Yes, yes, tell us Dad!” shouted Duncan impatiently.

“My main premise is... “

Duncan groaned and rolled his eyes at Jessica, but his Dad did not notice, as he was warming to his theme and deep in thought.

“..maybe the Christmas monster belongs to a magical world,” continued his Dad. “Maybe he fell into our world one day by accident, when he was out playing with his friends.”

The two children looked impressed. Duncan’s father also felt rather pleased with himself and wondered if he’d missed his vocation after all and should go into making children’s films.

“Do you think he’ll come back?” asked Duncan in a small little voice, not really wanting to hear the answer.

“It’s hard to say Duncan” said his Dad. “It must have been pretty scary for him here. But then we never really know what it is that people are running away from.”

Jessica suddenly realized that the Christmas monster's tiny sparkling boots and little red hat were still lying on the floor where he had left them. She gave the hat to Duncan, and kept the boots for herself. At least they had evidence that the Christmas monster was real. She wished she had caught the little creature now, but only so she could have helped him. Duncan would have liked a closer look at the tiny trident.

Duncan's father stood up, and grinned at the two children.

"Well, I've got Christmas cards to post for your mother, before the post office closes. If you see the Christmas monster again, let me know. Maybe when I get back, we could keep looking for him, I'd like to see this strange creature for myself, after hearing so much about him."

He picked up a pile of Christmas cards from the desk.

On one of the Christmas cards, there was a stamp with a rather unusual design. It looked as if there was a tiny red creature clinging to the stamp, making itself as flat as possible, trying not to fall off.

Duncan was half dreaming about red flying creatures, so thought at first he was imagining it, and then the stamp winked at him!

"Dad! The Christmas card!"

"What? The Christmas card!" yelled his Dad, leaping around in confusion, and throwing all the cards up into the air at once. The cards went flying through the air, and the Christmas monster could be seen riding one of the cards like a surf board, having the time of his life. Maybe the girl Christmas monster had reminded him of why he had wanted to come into our world in the first place. Maybe it's only fun to be playing hide and seek when you know that someone is looking for you.

Jessica and Duncan burst out laughing. The little red creature flew around the room, whooping and swooping, with his red hair standing up on end and his bright red socks almost falling off his tiny feet, now that Jessica had his boots.

Jessica had an idea. She ran around the house collecting a few things, she picked up the bright blue Christmas gift, some tinsel off the Christmas tree, a mince pie and her advent calendar. Then in a corner of the living room, she made a little home, just for the Christmas monster. Last but not least, she placed his hat and sparkling boots carefully inside.

To her delight, the tiny creature flew down into his new home, burrowed into the Christmas wrapping paper, and fell instantly asleep. This time, the two children knew better than to try and catch him. It meant more to them now, to know that the Christmas monster felt so safe with them, that he had been able to fall asleep. They jumped around a bit longer because they were so full of energy from all the excitement that they could not possibly sit still, but eventually Jessica's mother arrived to take her home.

The Christmas Monster

Later that night, when the Christmas lights were twinkling brightly in the darkness, and the children were curled up in their beds, the Christmas monster vanished back into his magical world.

Not long after this story was written, our office received a tiny report (it was so tiny that we needed a magnifying glass to read it and almost missed it in the mail delivery).

The report was from the girl Christmas monster. According to her report, the little Christmas monster was meant to be sprinkling magic dust over approximately a thousand Christmas trees. It is their job, she explained, to make Christmas magical, but they are supposed to do this without being seen and then return to their magical world, after the work is done.

Rather than working his way around a thousand Christmas trees, our Christmas monster decided that it would be more exciting to have some fun instead. The tiny girl who came after him, was from search and rescue. Either way, he was in trouble for having shirked his duties and run away, so maybe that's why he had been crying. Or maybe our world was not as much fun as he had hoped for.

She wanted to make it very clear, that she had done everything in her power to rescue the Christmas monster and prevent him from being seen by humans, but now, she wanted nothing more to do with him and couldn't care less what became of him. They could not keep sending out search and rescue parties for him. If we found him, we were to tell him that she was now friends with Jostle and Quingle, and not to expect an invitation to her end of year party.

The girl Christmas monster also had a lot to say about being described as a monster. She politely requested that we describe her type of creature as a *Magicus Rubeo*. Apparently the name means something in Latin.