

# The Night Watcher

by Emily Geng, grade 8

Amanda had always considered herself a good mother. She ensured that her children ate healthy, went to bed on time, and finished their chores before doing anything else. The hours after she tucked them into bed and blew goodnight kisses were her favourite, when she finally got to relax for the night. But lately, something was off, and it wasn't easy to unwind.

Her youngest daughter, Eliana, had started acting strange, and Amanda's certainty of being a good mom was cracking.

Eliana was always an easy child; she had a bubbly personality and was full of energy. She never ran in the house, never threw temper tantrums, or refused to cooperate when asked. However, after Eliana's 5th birthday, Amanda had been observing her daughter's growth carefully. How does she behave with other children her age? Does she seek comfort from adults when she feels scared or hurt? How does she express her emotions when feeling upset?

She noticed that Eliana was no longer the sunny child Amanda once knew. Instead, she was withdrawn and seemed disturbed. Recently, she'd taken to sleeping with her lights on and insisting that Amanda close the closet door and check under her bed for so-called "monsters".

“Mommy,” she said one night. “There’s something under the bed,”

“There’s nothing under your bed, sweetie. It’s just your imagination, go to sleep now,” Amanda stroked her hair.

“No, it’s real. I’ve seen it before. The things under the bed are real,”

Amanda sighed. She was frustrated with her daughter’s behaviour, as she knew that this happened to all children, but they never took it so seriously. Still, just to please her, she took a peek underneath the bed. There was nothing but dust bunnies and forgotten toys that rolled underneath it.

“Here, take your bear, Elli,” she said, handing her daughter the new teddy bear she had purchased earlier that week. “He will make you feel better, don’t be afraid,”

The look of panic on Eliana’s face faded away as she clutched her new teddy bear tightly. There was a ring of bulges surrounding her under the mountain of blankets where she kept all her other stuffed animals. They would protect her. She didn’t seem afraid anymore, but still, she tugged on the sheets and pulled them up to her chin.

Amanda thought that the best way to handle the problem was to just wait until Eliana figured it out herself that there, in fact, were no monsters under her bed. The thoughts would go away at some point... wouldn’t they?

“Do you want to sleep with your lights on?” Amanda asked, though she already knew what her answer was going to be.

Eliana’s expression was thoughtful for a moment, then she shook her head.

“No, it’s okay. My bear will keep me safe, cause’ he says that it’s gonna be okay,”

Amanda was surprised, not sure of what to make of it. Eliana had never spoken like this about her other stuffed animals. She assumed that it was just a comforting ritual, the kind of fantasy children often develop.

She planted a kiss on her daughter’s forehead and gently closed the door.

“Goodnight,” she whispered.

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That night was a breaking point.

There were faint sounds of movement coming from Eliana’s room. Amanda had learned to ignore the occasional creaks of the floorboards in the house, and the rustling of the trees in the wind, but this was different. These were muffled voices and shuffling around, coming specifically from down the hall.

At first, there was hesitation, but then being reminded of Eliana’s tiny voice in her head, Amanda quietly padded down the hall, turned the knob of her door, and peered through the door crack. She froze in her tracks.

Eliana was sitting up in bed, holding the bear to her chest. Her face was calm like a weight had been lifted. But there was something else. In the dim light, there were shadows

moving in the corner, near the foot of the bed. They seemed to stretch abnormally, dark and thick like ink being poured into water.

“Go away,” she exclaimed to the nothingness in the room. “I told you to leave, and you wouldn’t listen. But the bear won’t let you get to me.”

There was something that Amanda couldn’t see, but something that her daughter was clearly aware of. The teddy bear, which she had once thought of as just a comfort item, now felt different. The little bear’s button eyes seemed to shine slightly in the darkness, almost as if it were alive, watching the room.

“I told you,” Eliana repeated. “You can’t hurt me. The bear will stop you.”

Without thinking, Amanda walked over to the bed.

“Elli, what’s going on?” she asked gently, but her voice trembled.

“Hi Mommy, don’t be scared. Teddy says it’ll be okay, he fought off the monsters,”

Before Amanda could respond, the shadows in the room twisted that just wasn’t possible for mere darkness. The temperature in the room seemed to drop, and she took a step back, heart pounding in her chest. The dark figures reached out to them but never grasped far enough to harm them.

The bear’s eyes glowed brilliantly, a chill in the air, but then, as quickly as the shadows appeared, they retreated, fading back into the corner. The room was still once again.

Eliana looked at her mother, a small smile on her face. “See? I told you, the bear made it go away.”

Amanda was in awe. She hadn't believed in things like ghosts or spirits before, but now, she wasn't so sure.

The next morning, Amanda found herself to be questioning everything. To find some answers, she decided to take a visit to the small business shop in town from where she had purchased the bear.

The elderly shopkeeper, a woman with sharp, deep blue eyes, recognized the bear immediately when Amanda placed it on the countertop while explaining her dilemma.

"Ah, this one," the woman said, gently stroking the bear's fur. "This bear is a special one. Passed down through generations. It's said to protect children who can see what others cannot—things that hide in the shadows."

Amanda laughed, but it was hollow, and one of those laughs that were heard, but not completely felt. "Things that hide in the shadows, you say?"

"It's a guardian, of sorts. For children who are more sensitive to the unseen."

Amanda's mind reeled. Could it be true? Was Mia's imagination really seeing things? Or was something more dangerous lurking in the darkness, things that only Mia could sense? Was this some special ability or a disorder?

"It was made by a German artisan whose family had a long history of making 'protective' toys for children, after experiencing the same situation you are in now," the lady continued. "They felt as if ignorance was the greatest flaw, and they had toys crafted in their workshop and then given away to families in need. It's funny if you think about it, as this is one of the smallest issues in our big world right now, but they valued children's growth very much."

“And well, I see that our little soldier here has been helpful of some sort, I hope?” the woman inquired. “I suggest that you hold on to this bear. Keep it close. At least until your child’s nightmares go away,”

Amanda’s eyes widened and let out a breath of air in relief. “They’re nightmares? Oh, good. So, they aren’t real. I was worried for a moment, worried that these illusions could be real after all,”

“Illusions?” the woman barked out a chuckle. “They’re illusions if you would like to call them that, but it depends on who you ask, and I’d like to say that many might not agree. But anyhow, if I were you, I’d keep the bear as a precaution. Have a lovely day!”

She turned around to assist another customer and Amanda was left to herself. She didn’t know what to think, but something deep inside told her that the bear had been exactly what Eliana needed all along.

The next week, she began to confront her daughter head-on.

“Sweetie,” she began, sitting down beside her. “What exactly do you see when you say there’s something under the bed?”

Eliana looked up with a confused expression, her lips parted as if the question was difficult to answer. She glanced at her teddy bear before speaking, “The things that live in the dark, Mommy. They want to come out. But they can’t. Not if I have the bear.”

“And what happens if you don’t have the bear?”

Eliana shook her head. “They can’t get me with the bear. But without it... they try to reach me.”

That evening, Eliana slept peacefully. Amanda secretly thanked the inventors of the protective toys that were made so long ago.

She had accepted the fact that the bear wasn't just a toy—it was something more. It had become Eliana's protector. And as she stood there, listening to the steady breathing, she made a silent promise to her daughter.

Whatever the truth was about the bear, Amanda would protect her with everything she had. She would never let anything hurt her, no matter how odd or terrifying it seemed. She liked to think that in the end, it just couldn't be explained at all and that the bear found the right child, her child. It was doing exactly what it was made to do.

As the night grew longer, with the shadows always retreating at Eliana's command, Amanda knew one thing for sure: The bear would keep her safe.

And maybe, just maybe, it was enough.