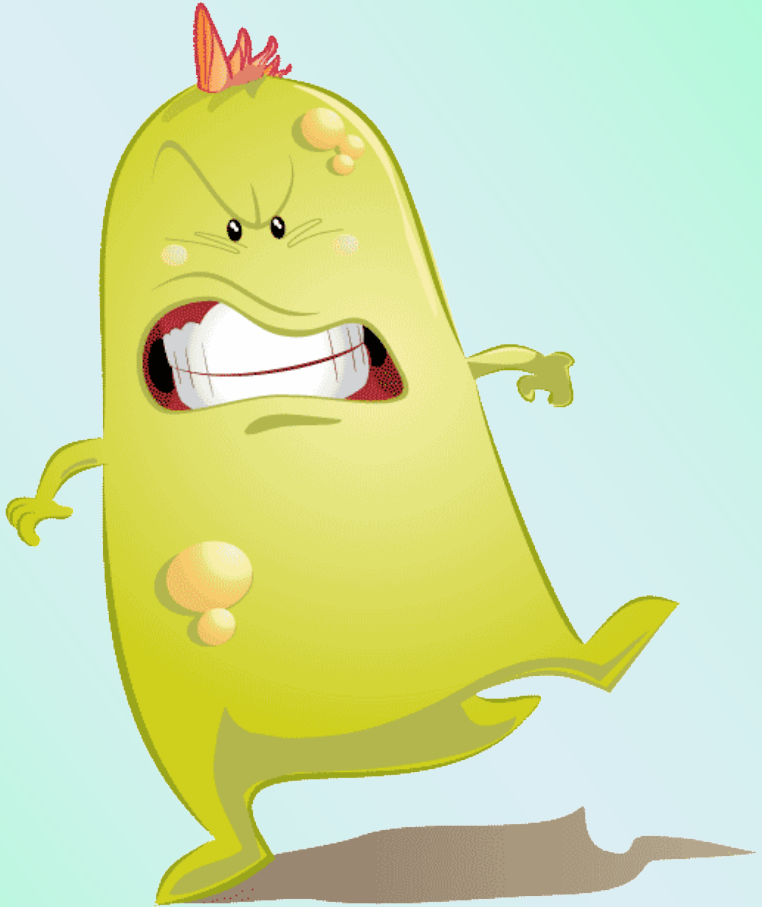


Monsterzine!



by

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For Cyrus Godivala

Chapter One

“Jared!” yelled Connor. “Give me back my Monsterzine!”

Jared held the comic book high over his brother’s head. Connor knew better than to jump for it. Jared was taller than he was, and would just lift it higher.

Instead, Connor shoved him. “Jared, give it back! It’s mine!”

Jared barely moved. “Come and get it, Squirt!”

“Don’t call me that! And give it back! MOM!”

“Stop fighting, you two!” their mother called out from the kitchen.

“But Mom!” Connor yelled. “Jared stole my monster comic!”

Their mother appeared in the kitchen doorway. She was wearing her bright red apron, the one that Connor called her bull-fighting cape. Her hair was short and curly and her eyes were blue and pretty. But right now, she looked as mad as a bullfighter.

“Will you two please stop it? I’ve been listening to you bickering all day. Can we please have some peace and quiet?”

“But Mom, I was being peaceful and quiet!” Connor said. “I was reading my *Monsterzine*, and Jared grabbed it away from me!” He glared up at his brother. It was so unfair! Connor always got in trouble, and it was always Jared who started the fights. Always!

Jared smirked.

Connor wished he were big enough to push Jared out the front door, down the porch steps, and all the way down the street to the big ditch at the bottom. Sploosh! Then he’d come out covered in green slime and looking like a monster. Or better yet, maybe he’d be eaten by a monster. That would serve him right.

“Enough!” their mother said. “I don’t want to hear another word out of you two.”

“But, Mom, Jared started it!”

“Connor, please! No more!” She turned and marched back into the kitchen.

Connor scowled. It wasn’t his fault!

Jared held out the comic. “Better not yell for Mom this time. She said not another word.”

Connor snatched his Monsterzine back.

"Off to play with your imaginary monster friends?" Jared asked. Then he leaned down and whispered, "Everyone knows there's no such thing as monsters, weirdo."

Connor knew he wasn't supposed to argue with Jared any more, but he couldn't help it. "There are too, and I hope that someday they come to this house and eat you."

Jared laughed. "Monsters are stupid."

"How can they be stupid if they're not real?"

"Oh, so they're not real?"

"No!" Connor said. "I mean, yes! I mean, how can *you* say they're stupid if you don't even believe in them? I know they're real. They're real and they're smarter than you, so there."

"Whatever, shrimp. You're younger and smaller than everyone, so no one cares what you think. Even if a real monster was standing right here, do you think anyone would listen to you?" Jared stood with his feet apart and his arms out like a sumo wrestler. He screwed up his face and said "Urk, urk, urk!"

Connor crossed his arms. "Jared, you look stupid. What are you doing?"

"I'm a monster. Urk, urk, urk! Now tell Mom there's a monster here, and see if she believes you!"

"For your information, Jared, monsters don't say 'urk'." Connor snorted in triumph. "Everyone knows that monsters say 'Oooargh!'"

Connor turned and marched away. Jared made him so mad! But his big brother had been right about one thing: no one ever seemed to believe Connor. That was Jared's fault, for being older.

Never mind, he'd go away and read his comic and wish hard that a monster would come along and eat Jared.

"Connor! Jared!" their mother called.

Connor ran to the kitchen to see what his Mom wanted. Jared ran around the house in the other direction, and stood in the doorway from the sunroom.

The kitchen was all floury. There was flour on the counter, flour on the table, and two big bags of flour near the stove.

"I have to go to the store," their Mom said. "I'm in the middle of baking goodies for my book club meeting tonight, and I ran out of sugar. I won't be long, okay? Jared, look after your brother."

"Oh, Mom!" Connor groaned.

"And don't mess up the house. There will be a lot of people here tonight, so I want the place to stay spotless. And I've counted every single scone that came out of the oven, so don't even think about touching one."

With that, their Mom took off her apron, grabbed her car keys, and headed out the back door.

The door opened once more. Their mother stuck her head back in and said, "Do *not* mess up the house, got it?"

Her head disappeared again.

Jared stared at Connor, and smirked.

Uh-oh.

Chapter Two

The back door clicked shut. Both brothers stared at each other, Connor ready to run, and Jared ready to chase him.

Just then, the *click-click* sound of the mail slot reached them. Would today be the day Connor's new issue of Monsterzine arrived? He spun around and started to run to the front door. One second later, Jared's feet came slapping across the kitchen floor behind him.

Connor sprinted down the hallway. Jared's feet pounded after him. Something in a shiny, plastic wrapper fell from the mail slot. It was Connor's Monsterzine, and he had to get it before Jared!

He ran hard. He was only a few feet away now, and Jared was gaining on him. Connor dove towards the door, grabbed the comic just as it hit the floor, and rolled away in a perfect somersault. He came up running and zipped through the living room door.

He was running so fast, the rug bunched up under his feet and he almost tripped. A loud *clunk-clunk-BOOM* noise came from behind him.

Jared had stumbled over the rug. *Yes!* Connor continued to run, through the living room, through the dining room, into the sunroom, and he could see through the kitchen to the back door...

Jared's feet started pounding after him again. Connor had an idea. He ran into the kitchen, opened the back door, and slammed it shut. Now it would sound like he had gone outside. Then he slid inside the basement door and pulled it closed behind him.

He heard Jared's feet thump by. The back door creaked open. "Connor!" Jared yelled.

Connor stood with his back against the basement door, holding his breath. Had it worked, had he fooled Jared? He clutched his comic tightly, making it crinkle. Oh, no! He didn't want to crush it. He moved his hand and felt his thumb press against something rubbery. What was that?

"Connor!" Jared yelled again from the kitchen. "You've got to come inside sometime, and I'll be waiting for you!"

Connor sighed with relief. Whew! His brother believed he had run outside, which meant he was safe for now.

"I'd rather be alone with a monster than with Jared," he muttered to himself.

Chapter Three

Connor stood at the top of the dark basement staircase. Well, that was one problem out of the way. Now for the next.

The basement was big and dark, with shadowy corners and old, weird furniture. Ceiling-high stacks of boxes lined the walls. It was scary even with the light on, and right now the light was off. Even worse, whoever had built the house had put the light switch at the bottom of the stairs. Only a crack of light shone from under the door to the kitchen.

Connor held his breath and felt his way down the staircase. The stairs were wooden and unfinished, which meant there were gaps at the back of his feet. He tried not to imagine big monsters under the stairs, ready to reach through and grab his ankles...

His feet went *tap, tap, tap*, on the wooden steps. Then, *creeeeeak!* One of the stairs made a groaning sound. Connor stopped. He could feel his heart thumping.

Taking another deep breath, he moved again. Finally, he reached the bottom step. This was the second scary part. Connor had to stand at the very edge and reach wayyyy up for the light cord. He worried that some day he'd reach up and the cord wouldn't be there. Instead, there would be a long, scaly monster arm, reaching down to grab him. Or maybe a huge, sticky spider web...

Telling himself that it didn't feel anything like a spider's web, he gave the cord a good, hard yank. The bare light bulb blinked on. Connor breathed a sigh of relief. He was now standing in a pool of light.

However, the pool of light was small, which meant that parts of the basement were still hidden in shadowy shapes. Connor tiptoed past them to his fort, sat down, and scooted backwards into safety.

His fort was made of blankets and old sofa cushions. It had a cushion floor and walls, a blanket ceiling, and best of all, a piece of cardboard he could pull in front like a door if he wanted to stay hidden from anyone. Like monsters, for instance, or older brothers.

Connor kept a flashlight in his fort. He clicked it on and immediately felt much better.

The cushions were a purply-red color. They were a little bit scratchy, but still nice and squishy. The blanket above him was a thick, grey one his family used on camping trips, and it still smelled like camping. Like pine trees and dried grass and summer dust. Connor loved the smell.

He flipped onto his stomach and plunked down his comic book.

MONSTERZINE!

It was his favorite comic. Not only that, but this month's issue was supposed to come with a special Monster Fighter badge.

And it had! As Connor tore off the plastic wrapper, a round, shiny badge fell out. It was gold and said 'Monster Fighter!' In the middle of it was a round, squishy button, sort of like an eraser but softer. Connor wondered what it did. Excitedly, he flipped open the comic.

INSIDE this SPECIAL EDITION

Your

MONSTER FIGHTER BADGE

Wear this while FIGHTING MONSTERS

Congratulations - You are now an OFFICIAL MONSTER
FIGHTER!

(WARNING: Do not press green button. This is for
EMERGENCIES only.)

"Uh, oh," said Connor. He had squished the green button when he was at the top of the stairs. Oh, well. Nothing bad had happened.

You only get ONE WISH with the green button so DON'T
WASTE IT!

Use it... for the forces of GOOD!

"Uh, oh," said Connor again. He hadn't made any wishes, so hopefully the button would still work. It would be awful if he didn't get his wish. After all, the comic cost him two dollars a month. And how often did he get a real wish?

He proudly pinned his Monster Fighter badge to his red sweater, then flicked to the next page of the comic. He sighed happily. Connor loved Monsterzine.

Every month, there were FIVE different stories about monsters. Whenever Connor read the stories, a delicious chill ran up his spine.

There was always a hero in the stories, and the hero always won. Usually the hero was Garth Zooten. He was Connor's favorite character. Connor wished he could be like Garth, defeating and vanquishing monsters. Connor wasn't sure what 'defeating' or 'vanquishing' meant, but the words sounded good. And they had something to do with the hero always winning.

Connor peeked out from his fort and shone his flashlight once around the basement, checking for monsters before settling down to read the first story.

GARTH ZOOTEN and the HURKELFLAZ!

"Hur-kel-flaz," Connor repeated. Monsters often had difficult names.

"Stand back, Hurkelflaz! I am Garth Zooten the Monster Fighter, and I will vanquish you!"

"Oooarrrgh!" yelled the monster.

He was big and green and slimy. (Monsters usually were.)

"I've got you cornered in this building, Hurkelflaz! There's no escape for you!"

The Hurkelflaz oozed towards Garth. Garth held up his Frozo Gun. The Frozo Gun was Garth's favorite weapon, but it didn't always work. Sometimes the Frozo Gun got rid of monsters, but sometimes Garth had to try other things. Monsters were tricky like that. Some could be killed by cold, others by heat. Some melted in sunlight, while others had to be shipped off to the moon.

The monster saw the Frozo Gun and backed away.

"He's trapped!" said Connor.

But the monster oozed towards a doorway... and slid down some stairs. He was escaping! Not only that, but he was now in a dark, creepy basement.

Connor gasped. Monsters and basements were the scariest combination in the world! With a gulp, he slapped the comic shut, flicked off his flashlight, and listened. Listened for oozy sounds...

There was a loud *crash* from above. Jared jumped so hard, he dropped his flashlight. What was that? A monster?

He heard another *thump-bump* noise. It sounded it like was coming from the kitchen. *Jared*, he decided. He was probably doing something stupid like jumping off chairs.

Connor picked his flashlight up and opened the comic. But this time, he skipped to the second story. He'd finish the first one another time. He thought about going up

to his room, where it was bright and safe. But then Jared would find him, and he was even worse than a monster. Monsters wanted to eat you, but they could only do that once. Jared would go on being his brother for ever and ever.

More thumps and bumps came from above. Hearing them from the basement was a little bit scary, so Connor put his hands over his ears and started to read the second story.

Chapter Four

MONSTER MINIONS FROM MARS

Garth Zooten and another monster-fighter, the Monster Ranger, stood ready to leave their headquarters.

“Ready, Monster Ranger?”

“Ready, Zooten.”

“Let’s go!”

They opened the door and leapt through.

Immediately, they were in a swirly, swishy world of circling blues and greens.

“Zooten! What’s going on here?”

“Put on your Creature Detecto-Specs, Monster Ranger! I have a bad feeling about this.”

Garth Zooten and the Monster Ranger put on their special eyewear. Suddenly, monster arms reached towards Garth and Ranger from all directions!

“Retreat! Retreat!” yelled the Ranger.

They stepped back through the door and tried to close it. Monster arms tried to grab them. Zooten fought the arms back and shut the door with a bang.

“What just happened, Zooten?”

“The monsters must have used some kind of Monster Magic so that we’d step straight into one of their worlds as soon as we went outside.”

“But how could they do that? I thought monsters were stupid!”

“They’re about as smart as you and me, Ranger!”

“So that makes them...”

“Yes. Really, really smart.”

“Wow.”

“You know what this means, don’t you, Ranger?”

“That we shouldn’t go outside today?”

“No! It means there are monsters to fight. Let’s go!”

Connor sighed. How cool! He wondered what it would be like to run up the stairs, open the door, and for the whole world to be different. What would it mean?

Well for one thing, he wouldn't have to go to school. That would be neat. And maybe Jared would be gone. That would be even neater.

He turned the page.

"Zooten, our Frozo Guns are almost out of Freeze Juice! We'd better get more!"

"To the basement!"

Uh, oh, thought Connor. Another basement.

Garth and the Monster Ranger ran down a long flight of stairs. They came to a big, dark basement. Walls dripped slime, and a light bulb fizzed.

Connor flicked the page, not sure if he wanted to read more. Everyone knew that monsters liked dark places.

The next drawing showed the back of a monster. A big, warty, squishy monster. And it was looming over the two monster fighters! The monster lurked in a dark corner of the basement, underneath some stairs. And Garth and Ranger were right in front of it. The monster reached towards them...

A scratching noise came from the corner of Connor's basement. He looked up. He flicked his flashlight off so that whatever it was, it wouldn't see the light coming from his fort.

Click... click... click... What was that noise? Was it monster claws, tapping on the cement floor as they crept towards him?

Then, a 'WHOOOOMF!' sound came.

“Aaaaaaaa!” yelled Connor.

There was another ‘click’, and the ‘whoomf’ sound ended. The furnace! It was just the furnace. The furnace always made a ‘whoomf’ sounded when it turned on.

Connor almost melted into a little puddle on his cushions.

This was too much! All the stories in this month’s Monsterzine seemed to involve basements. Connor decided to go back upstairs, Jared or no Jared. If he sat in the kitchen, the comic wouldn’t feel as exciting, but their Mom would be home soon, and she wouldn’t let Jared steal the comic. Hopefully.

Connor flicked off his flashlight. He always left it in his hiding place so that Jared wouldn’t steal it.

He tiptoed to the bottom of the stairs, stood on the bottom step, and reached up for the light cord. He clicked it off.

Now the basement was in total darkness. Connor had to wait a minute for his eyes to adjust.

But something was wrong. What was it?

Connor looked up the stairs. Everything was dark. Which made sense, because he’d switched the light off, but...

...there should have been a crack of light coming from underneath the kitchen door. And there was no light. What was going on?

Chapter Five

Connor crept up the basement stairs. He reached for the door handle and slowly pushed. The door creaked open. Connor gasped. He couldn't believe his eyes.

There, in the middle of the kitchen, stood a huge, green monster. It was as tall as the refrigerator and as wide as the table. Its body was huge and triangular-shaped. A big, gaping mouth opened and closed, and two small monster arms waved around. Not only that, it was eating Mom's scones! With jam! No, never mind the scones and jam... it was a MONSTER!

"Urrrrrrrrrrgh!" it said.

"Aaaaaaaaah!" yelled Connor.

"Ooooo-argh!" it roared.

"Aaaaa-aaah!" yelled Connor.

He wanted to run back down the stairs, but then he would be trapped. Not only trapped, but in a scary, dark

basement. Instead, he jumped into the kitchen, took a huge step sideways to the hallway, and ran as fast as he could.

He pounded up the stairs to his bedroom and slammed the door shut. Could monsters climb stairs?

"Mom!" he yelled from his room. Then he remembered she wasn't at home. "Jared!" he yelled instead. "Jared, help, there's a monster!"

There was no answer.

Where had Jared been when the monster arrived? The last time Connor had heard Jared, he had been in... oh, no! The kitchen!

"Jared?" he said again, but this time it came out in a whisper.

"Oh, no," Connor said. The magic button! He hadn't made a wish out loud, but he had *thought* how neat it would be to open the door to the kitchen and find monsters. And then he *had* found a monster!

"Oh, no!" he said again. "I wished us a monster, and it's gone and eaten Jared!"

What on earth would he do? His Mom and dad would ground him for ever when they found out.

"Mom!" he yelled. Suddenly, he wanted to cry. He hadn't meant to get rid of his brother. He had always wished that a monster would eat Jared, but now he realized that getting rid of his brother meant *forever*. No more Jared, ever again!

But what if the monster hadn't eaten him? What if he had just taken him prisoner, and had hidden him somewhere?

Yes! Connor jumped off his bed. That must be it! Connor would find Jared and rescue him, and Jared would be forever thankful and never be mean to Connor again.

He could hear clumping sounds from downstairs. He swallowed nervously. Connor had always thought how much fun it would be to fight a monster, but now it seemed really scary. What if he couldn't do it?

Garth Zooten stared at Connor from one of the posters on the bedroom wall. ***GO, Monster Fighters!*** the poster said. Garth was pointing his finger straight out, like he was sending Connor out the door. Connor gasped. He had to be brave! He just had to!

"I'll do it!" Connor said, and swung around like a soldier.

Vanquish those monsters! another poster told him.

"I will! I will! I'll varnish them!"

Vanquish! the poster said.

"Right! Vanquish! Here I come!"

Connor pulled a red pillowcase off one of his pillows and tied it around his shoulders like a cape. He took his swimming goggles and put them on like Garth's Creature Detecto Specs. He straightened his shirt and touched his Monster Fighter badge for good luck (but not the green button in the middle).

Monsterzine

Then he pulled open his bedroom door.

“Look out, Monster, here I come!”

Chapter Six

Connor ran down the stairs, prepared for battle.

Halfway down, he realized that he didn't have any weapons. Uh-oh! He paused on the stairs and thought about it.

"Oh, well..." he said, and kept going. He hoped the monster hadn't eaten Jared yet. He also hoped he'd be brave enough to fight the monster. He had to be! He was an Official Monster Fighter, now.

Connor ran into the kitchen, where the monster was busy throwing more scones into its big mouth.

"Oh, no!" Connor said. "Not all Mom's scones!"

He grabbed the nearest thing he could find, which was a small dustpan with flowers painted on it. Not very scary, but it would have to do.

"Hey, Monster, get away from those scones!"

The monster looked around and made a growly, gurgly sound, like it had a huge booger at the back of its throat.

"Ewww," Connor said. "I mean, surrender! You're trapped, Monster! Now tell me what you've done with my brother!"

The monster roared, spraying globs of chewed scone across the kitchen floor. It continued to throw more scones into its mouth. Next, it picked up the entire tray and tipped the remaining scones down its throat. Red goo lined the monster's mouth. Connor gasped. Was it blood? He spotted an open jam jar on the counter.

"I didn't know monsters put jam on their scones," Connor said.

"Uuuurg!" the monster said, and threw the entire jam jar in its mouth. Finished with the food, it turned towards Connor.

"Aaaaaah!" Connor yelled. He turned and ran.

The monster was huge and oozy and slimy, and luckily, this meant it couldn't run fast. Connor tore down the hallway. As he ran, he realized he should have looked for Jared *before* yelling at the monster.

He sprinted down the hallway, banging open closet doors and hoping to find Jared tied up with a piece of tape over his mouth. Connor wasn't too sure if he would *untie* Jared, or take the tape off, but he sure hoped his brother would be okay.

"Uuuuuuurk!" the monster yelled as he went *shloop-shloop-shloop* after Connor.

"Jared?" Connor yelled as he flipped open more doors. He circled the house until he was almost back in the kitchen. He flicked open one final door and a whole bunch of mops, brooms and dusters tumbled out behind him.

"Urg!" the monster said as it squished into them. A mop handle pressed into its big, bulbous body, and it roared in pain.

Connor skidded to a stop and turned around. He had an idea!

Chapter Seven

Connor snatched up a broom. Now he had a weapon! He started whapping the monster. The monster howled and oozed backwards, towards the sunroom. Connor kept hitting it.

The sunroom was hot. And as the monster moved, it was leaving a trail of green slime. Maybe this was the kind of monster that melted in the heat!

As the monster moved back, its trail of slime grew thicker and thicker.

"Yes! It's working! He's melting!" Connor shouted.

"Uuuuuuurk!" the monster wailed. "Urrrrrrrk!"

Only, where was Jared? If he wasn't a prisoner... oh, no! Had the monster already eaten him?

Then Connor had another great idea. He turned the broom around, held the brush end, and ran straight towards the monster.

The pole end drove straight into the monster's stomach. Maybe if Connor pressed hard into the monster's tummy, he could make it barf up Jared! He might still be alive in there, just a little slimy.

"Urrrrrrrk!" the monster roared.

Connor frowned. His brain was trying to tell him something, but he didn't have time to think right now. He took a few steps back and aimed the broom again.

"Okay, monster! Prepare to be vanquished!" He thrust the broom into the monster's tummy a second time.

"URK! URK!"

Connor stopped.

Wait a minute! Monsters didn't say 'Urk!' Monsters said 'Ooooargh!' Everyone knew that. Everyone except—

"Jared?" he whispered.

"Urrrrrrrk!" the monster wailed, looking very sad. Suddenly, it began to cry.

"Great grasshopper's underpants!" Connor cried. "You're Jared!"

"Urk!"

The monster sniffled. He oozed a couple of inches lower.

"Oh, no!" Connor said. "You're Jared! And you're melting! Quick, Jared, you have to get out of the sunroom!"

However, the monster was too busy crying and melting to do anything.

"No!" Connor yelled. "Jared, you have to come into the kitchen!"

But the Jared-monster couldn't walk any more. Connor ran around behind him, put his back against his squishy monster-brother, and pushed. It was like trying to move a large Jell-o. With much pushing and squelching, Jared finally slid back into the kitchen. Connor ran and opened the refrigerator door. "We have to cool you down!"

He opened the freezer door, too. "There, hopefully that'll stop you from melting. Then we have to figure out how to turn you back into your real self!"

When he turned around, he saw that the monster was looking plenty angry.

"Jared?" he asked nervously.

"Urrrrrrrrrrrk!"

"Uh-oh."

The Jared-monster ran towards him. Connor fled.

"Jareeeeeed!" he yelled as he ran. "I'm trying to help you!"

There was a smack as the Jared-monster ran into the open freezer door. The door slammed shut, and Jared growled again. He face looked kind of flattened, but every bit as angry.

Connor yelped and ran for the stairs.

Chapter Eight

“Urg, urg, urg!” Jared yelled as he tried to follow Connor up the stairs. Fortunately, he couldn’t climb them. He was too slimy.

Connor scampered into his room and banged the door shut.

“What am I going to do?” he asked out loud.

Vanquish! a poster told him.

“Oh, shut up!” he said. “I can’t vanquish him, he’s my brother! And my parents will ground me forever when they find out I turned him into a monster. How will he be able to go to school? Or play softball?”

Connor flung himself down on his bed. He had to figure something out, and fast. His Mom would be home soon!

How on earth had he turned Jared into a monster, anyway? Just by thinking about it? His special Monster Fighter badge should have come with better instructions.

Then Connor remembered standing at the top of the basement stairs and saying, 'I'd rather be with a monster than Jared.' Oh, no! He really had said it out loud!

"I'm doooooomed!" he wailed. "What can I do?"

He looked up at one of his many posters of Garth Zooten. Garth stood proudly against a red background, holding his big Frozo Gun. A monster cowered away from him. Connor gasped.

"The cold," he said. "Sometimes the Frozo Gun makes monsters harmless. If it can change them... could it change Jared back?"

It was worth a try. Connor had barely managed to cool Jared down in the kitchen. He hadn't tried getting him *really* cold.

"Okay, Jared," Connor said. "You always wanted to be cool. Now, prepare to get frosty."

Chapter Nine

Connor ran back down the stairs. Where had Jared gone?

He heard a slurping sound from the kitchen and ran in. Jared was there, but he was oozing back towards the sunroom.

"No!" Connor said. "You'll melt in there!"

Jared turned and gave him a mournful look.

"Oh, no!" Connor said. "Jared! You... you don't want to melt, do you?"

"Urk," Jared said sadly, and continued on.

"No! Jared, I know you hate monsters, so that means you probably hate *being* a monster, and besides looking all gross and ugly, you probably won't be able to ride your bike any more, and Melissa Prentiss won't ever walk home from school with you. But you can't just melt away! Mom and Dad will kill me!"

Jared slid further away.

“And then I’ll have all this gross slime to clean up!” he added.

Still Jared oozed out of the kitchen.

“Wait!” Connor said. “What about me? Then I won’t have a brother! I mean, I’ve always wanted to be an only child... and I’d get your room, which would be really cool, and all your toys too, but...”

Jared turned back to look at him. His giant, monster mouth was in an upside-down “U” shape, and his lower lip trembled.

“...but I might miss you sometimes,” Connor added.

Jared looked hopeful.

Yes! It was true! He’d miss Jared. Well, it might be true... maybe he’d miss him a little bit. Some days. Anyway, Connor was a Monster Fighter, and it was up to him to rescue his brother.

Then Connor had another one of his great ideas. *Toys! Room!* Jared would never give those up, monster body or no monster body.

Connor crossed his fingers behind his back. “Forget what I said about missing you... I’ll get your ROOM!”

The Jared-monster growled.

“I’ll get to play with your entire soldier regiment! And leave them out in the rain!”

Jared oozed towards him menacingly. Connor shuffled towards the freezer.

“And I’ll invite Melissa Prentiss over for scones and jam!”

“Uuuuuurg!” Jared roared.

“C’mere, chunky!” Connor called, opening the freezer door. He slid out an ice cube tray. As Jared came towards him, Connor started hurling ice cubes. “C’mon and fight, you big slimy chicken!”

The ice cubes bounced off Jared. They didn’t seem to be having much effect. Connor was beginning to get worried. He was running out of ice cubes. Not only that, but he was backed against the refrigerator, and Jared getting closer!

Connor reached into the freezer and pulled out an entire frozen turkey. He lunged forward and thrust it into Jared’s weird little monster arms. Jared shrieked as the turkey touched his oozy, monster skin. The turkey dropped with a ‘clunk!’. Connor saw that it had left a patch in the middle of Jared’s chest, and that the patch looked like...

“Clothing!” Connor yelled. “Jared, you’re under there all right! We can change you back!”

“Urrrrrg!” Jared said. He looked mad.

Uh-oh, thought Connor. Jared didn’t like going cold turkey.

What else was cold? There were only a few packets of frozen vegetables left in the freezer. Now what was he going to do?

Chapter Ten

What's cold, what's cold? Connor wondered, looking around the kitchen. Nothing! Just the oven, which was hot, and the sink, which had...

"Cold water!" he shouted. "It'll have to do!"

But how would he be able to get Jared to the sink? And even if he did, the Jared-monster was far too big to fit under the tap.

"The hose!" he said, and swerved past Jared. Set into the counter was a hose with a nozzle. Connor yanked it out as far as it would go and spun the nozzle so that the water would come out full force. He whirled around to face Jared.

He felt like Garth Zooten with his Frozo Gun. Connor touched his Monster fighter badge once for good luck. And just in case there was a tiny bit of wish power left in it — after all, when he'd wished before, he'd only whispered it — he now said, loud and clear, "I wish Jared would change back to his old self."

He aimed the nozzle straight at his brother. "I think it's time for you to chill out, Jared."

And with that, he squeezed.

WHOOOOOOOOOSH whp whp whp whp whp
foooooooooosh! Water sprayed everywhere. It hit Jared, hit the stove, bounced off the cupboards, splashed into the sunroom. The force of the water was so strong that Connor could barely keep hold of the hose. He gripped it tight and tried to aim all the water at Jared. The drops trickling over Connor's fingers were good and cold.

"Oooooorg!" the monster wailed.

Connor sprayed and sprayed.

"Yooooorrg!"

The Jared-monster appeared to be getting smaller, and less green.

"Yooooou!" Jared yelled, as his hair popped out and green slime melted away to reveal clothes.

"... are... so... DEAD!"

Connor stopped spraying.

Jared looked like his old self again, except that his clothes were sopping wet, his hair was sticking out in messy clumps, and a few globs of slime still clung to him. He was also standing in a big puddle of water, and not looking one bit happy about it.

"What?" Connor asked.

"You... are... so... DEAD!"

Connor dropped the hose and ran.

Chapter Eleven

Connor was out the back door and halfway down the porch steps when he heard the car in the driveway. He stopped in his tracks.

Behind him, Jared stopped, too. The two brothers looked at each other for a second, wide-eyed.

They both wheeled around and ran back into the kitchen. And stopped dead.

“Oh, cripes,” Connor said.

It was a disaster.

All the scones were eaten. The kitchen was covered in water. There was water on the floor, on the table, on the counters, and on the walls. Not only that, but traces of green slime were plastered on the walls and ceiling as if the top had popped off a blender full of boogers.

The flour that had coated the kitchen had now turned into a sticky, white scum. The two bags of flour on

the counter had burst open, and were oozing gunk as if they were growing into monsters, too.

"We're doomed," Connor said.

"You're doomed," Jared corrected. "You sprayed the water."

"You ate the scones!" Connor said.

But that was kind of Connor's fault, too, because he had turned his brother into a monster in the first place.

Behind them, their mother's feet went *click-click-click* up the porch steps. They heard her halt, and they turned around slowly.

Their mother's mouth was open in a big "O" . Her bag of groceries fell straight out of her hands. Sugar went 'poom!' all over the porch.

"How did you manage to destroy my kitchen in less than half an hour?" she asked. She took a couple of steps inside, almost tripping over her grocery bag.

"Um, I can explain, Mom," Connor said.

"I was gone less than half an hour!"

"I know, Mom! You just said that. You see, the thing is—"

"Less than half an hour," she repeated.

Connor shuffled from foot to foot. It was getting kind of scary that his Mom kept saying the same thing. Finally, she looked away from all the mess and straight at Connor. He felt his face turn red.

"What did you do?" she asked.

"You see, Mom, there was this—" He was going to say 'monster', but then he realized she'd never believe him.

"How..." she murmured "...did you *do* this?" Her gaze came to rest on the empty baking tray. "And my scones! You ate *all* my scones?"

Uh-oh. Now she was starting to sound really mad.

"No, Mom, it wasn't me, it was..." Connor looked around in desperation. There was no point telling her about the monster. What was the point in trying to tell the truth? There was only one thing he could say that she'd believe.

"I did it," he said in a small voice. "It's my fault." He didn't have to feel bad about lying, because it wasn't really a lie. It was his fault, in a way.

"Connor, *what* made you do this?" she asked.

Connor glanced at his brother, who hadn't said anything. Jared was probably still mad at him. Connor felt like he might cry. Now his whole family would hate him. Maybe he should have let Jared remain a monster. His Mom would still have been mad, but at least she would have believed him.

Connor looked away in case Jared saw there were tears in his eyes.

"Um," he said, looking at the floor. "I was... I was..." He swallowed.

"He was fighting a monster," Jared said.

Connor turned and stared at his brother in surprise.

"Oh, *really*," their mother said.

Both boys faced her. She didn't sound pleased, and she sure didn't sound like she believed them. She crossed her arms and tapped the floor with her foot. "So," she said. "A monster came in, ate the scones, soaked the kitchen, and got green goo everywhere."

"No!" Connor answered. "Not exactly. The monster did eat the scones. But... it was me who soaked the kitchen."

"The slime is from the monster," Jared said. "But it's kind of Connor's fault, because he sprayed him. But he *was* fighting the monster, Mom."

Now she was glaring. Her foot had stopped tapping.

"And where is this monster?"

Jared and Connor gulped.

"Um," Connor said.

"He went away," Jared answered.

"Oh, *really*," she said.

"Yes!" they answered.

"Well, since the *monster* isn't here to clean up, you two are going to have to it. You're going to clean this kitchen from top to bottom, and you're not going to stop until it's spic and span."

They stood still.

"At once!" she shouted.

"Yes, ma'am!" they answered, and scrambled to find mops and brushes.

As Connor and Jared began to clean, they heard their Mom walking through the house.

"There's slime in here!" she exclaimed from the hallway.

"There's slime in here too!" she called from the living room.

"It's even slimy here!" she said from the sunroom.

Connor and Jared cleaned and scrubbed, and swept and mopped, and wiped and washed and dried. They cleaned the kitchen floor, the counters, the walls, and the windows. Connor even sat on Jared's shoulders to mop the ceiling. They did the same in the sunroom, and they did the same in the living room.

As Connor wiped the last spot of goop off the kitchen table, he heard his Mom mutter, "If they were just playing at monsters, then where on earth did all that green slime come from?"

Connor held his breath.

And just then, the doorbell rang. It was Mom's book club.

Chapter Twelve

Jared never spoke about it to Connor, ever again. But he did stop stealing Connor's Monsterzine comic.

That meant Connor didn't have to go down to the basement to read it. He could sit at the kitchen table. Except that his Mom seemed kind of jumpy whenever he was in the kitchen, so instead he went up to his bedroom.

He sat on his bed with his Garth Zooten posters above him and in front of him and around him, and his Monsterzine comic on his lap.

Garth Zooten stared out at him from the big red poster, pointing his finger and saying, 'GO, Monster Fighters!'

Somehow Garth didn't seem quite as important any more. And Monsterzine wasn't as scary. But Connor still sat there reading with a smile on his face. After all, it was his favorite comic.

He didn't wear his Monster Fighter badge any more. Even though there weren't supposed to be any more wishes left in it, Connor wasn't going to take any chances. He wrapped it in tissue paper, covered it in bubble wrap, put it in a box, put elastic bands around the box, and then wound tape around the whole thing. After that, he jammed it in the back of his drawer. Way, way, way at the back. Just in case.

Connor smiled and flicked open his comic.

GO, Monster Fighters!