

# Monster Problems

Books 1-3



Monster Problems: Vampire Misfire

Monster Problems 2: Down for the Count

Monster Problems 3: Prince of Dorkness

By  
R.L. Ullman



Monster Problems: Vampire Misfire  
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Cover designs and illustrations by Yusup Mediyani

Published by But That's Another Story... Press  
Ridgefield, CT

Printed in the United States of America.

First Printing, 2020.

ISBN: 978-1-7340612-7-7  
Library of Congress Control Number: 2020910990

## **PRAISE FOR MONSTER PROBLEMS**

### **Readers' Favorite BOOK AWARD WINNER**



“I absolutely loved *Monster Problems*. The story is action-packed and fast-paced. The characters were unique and lovable, as well as great role models. I was hooked by the first page and never wanted to put it down.” **Rating: 5.0 stars by Kristen Van Kampen (Teen Reviewer).**

“Ullman spins a monstrosity of a tale in the first book of his new series. It reminds me of *Harry Potter* with a twist. Hilarious and so unexpected. This book is one to believe in.” **Rating: 5.0 stars by Gail Kamer.**

“From the first sentence it draws you in and doesn’t let go until you’ve come to the very end. Ullman hits all the bases with this one. I can’t recommend this supernatural adventure highly enough!” **Rating: 5.0 stars by Sarah Westmoreland.**

“All the characters are portrayed so well they’ll remain fresh in the minds of readers. Like me, readers will be keen to grab book 2 to see what happens next.” **Rating: 5.0 stars by Mamta Madhavan.**

“*Monster Problems* is a grand romp that will thrill kids and forever-young adults alike. I’m thrilled it’s just the first book in Ullman’s new series. Most highly recommended.” **Rating: 5.0 stars by Jack Magnus.**

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Monster Problems: Vampire Misfire

Monster Problems 2: Down for the Count

Monster Problems 3: Prince of Dorkness

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To Esther and Lillian,  
thanks for looking out for me



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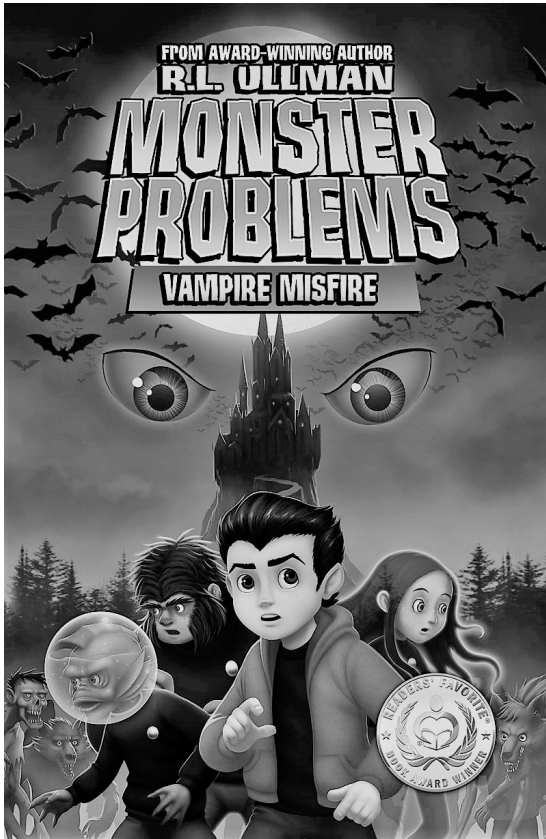
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# Monster Problems: Vampire Misfire







## **CHAPTER ONE**

### MY LIFE BITES

Clearly, I won't be getting any sleep.

Not after the thundering crash of my door against the wall. Or the snap of my window shade, which is now rapping annoyingly against the glass pane. Or the bright light shining in my eyes as daylight streams over my face.

Note to self: stop sleeping in rooms that don't lock from the inside.

"Well, well," comes a nasally voice. "This must be the special one himself."

Okay, here we go. I roll over reluctantly, squinting at the two goons hovering over me. Needless to say, their expressions are less than warm-and-fuzzy.

The first guy reminds me of a shark, with his pale, unblinking eyes and long, thin nose. He's short and wearing the most disturbing Christmas sweater I've ever seen, featuring a snowman swallowing a reindeer. For some reason, he's studying me like I'm some kind of a zoo animal while frantically scribbling notes on his clipboard.

The second guy could pass for Mr. Clean's stunt double, minus the earing and the charm. He's bald, dressed in all white like an orderly at a psychiatric hospital, and his biceps are twice the size of his head.

After our awkward three-way staredown, shark-face finally puts down his pen and says, "Mr. Abraham Matthews, I presume?"

"My friends call me Bram," I say. "So, you can call me Abraham."

Shark-face doesn't crack a smile. Instead, he looks down at his clipboard and presses on, "I see, Mr. Matthews, that you arrived in the wee hours of the morning. The night guard informed us you were hand-delivered by the police."

"Yep," I say. "They were in the neighborhood. Nice of the boys to give me a lift."

"I also understand," he says, "that you ran away from your group home three weeks ago—in Arizona."

"Ah, Arizona," I say. "Quite an interesting place. Did you know they'll arrest you for cutting down a cactus? Or that crazy roadrunner bird from the cartoon is actually real? Dynamite-carrying coyotes, however, not so much."

"You do realize, Mr. Matthews, that you are now in Massachusetts? That's over two-thousand five-hundred miles away."

"Really?" I say, faking a shiver. "No wonder I'm so darn cold."

"You're a funny guy," shark-face says. "But we can

be funny too. Isn't that right, Mr. Snide?"

"Hilarious," the bald guy says, cracking his knuckles.

"Do you know where you are?" shark-face asks.

"Well, I'm no detective," I say, taking a look around, "but I think you just told me I'm in Massachusetts." Other than these bozos and the giant daddy-long-legs hanging from the ceiling, the place has an all-too-familiar sparseness. There's a bed, a desk, and a closet, but that's about it.

"I'll be a little more specific," shark-face says. "You are at the New England Home for Troubled Boys. I am Mr. Glume, the Director, and my esteemed colleague here is Mr. Snide, the House Manager."

"Honored to make your acquaintance," I say. Truth be told, I've bounced around group homes like this my entire life. There was the one in Arizona. And before that California. And before that Oregon, and so on. I've been in so many of these joints I've lost count.

And they're all the same. They claim they'll find you a loving family. They claim you're just one step away from enjoying family movie nights and roasting marshmallows over a fire. But trust me, it never happens.

Not for kids like me.

Don't worry, there's no need to break out the violins. I'm a realist, so I know the odds are against me. After all, I'm twelve now, which means no first-time parents would touch me with a ten-foot pole. Think about it. Why would any wide-eyed, bushy-tailed couple looking to

adopt take on a troubled teen when they could drive off the lot with a brand-new baby instead? Trust me, they wouldn't. As soon as you're out of diapers, you're considered damaged goods.

Plus, I've got my, well, other quirks...

As Glume flips through the mountain of paperwork on his clipboard, his whisper-thin eyebrows rise higher and higher. Clearly, he's got my whole case file.

"You've been in the foster system since you were an infant," Glume says.

"Yep," I say. "Guess that makes me the poster child."

"It says your parents died in a house fire," he continues. "What a shame."

"I've come to grips with it," I say quickly.

"I'm sure you have," Glume says. "But it also says you have quite a long history of causing trouble. Lots of trouble. In fact, the director of your former group home doesn't want you back. She says you have... unusual habits?"

"Like she should talk," I scoff. "She didn't get the nickname 'Beast of Bourbon' for nothing."

"She says you stay up all night. You refuse to go to bed during mandatory lights out."

"I'm a night owl," I say. "I catch my 'z's' during the daytime. Otherwise, I get cranky. Like now, for instance."

"She says you avoid sunlight."

"I burn easily," I say. "I'm delicate."

“And you only eat food that is red in color?”

“Okay, now even I have to admit that’s a weird one. She’s got me there.”

Glume flips through more pages. “It seems several reports are accusing you of property damage—like flooding the basement.”

“Not true,” I say. “I walked in just as some kid threw the fire extinguisher into the washing machine. No one expected it to go off like that. The bubbles were insane.”

“And the broken windows on the second floor?”

“Purely an accident,” I counter. “They told us to do a craft project. Who knew taping worms to glass would attract so many birds?”

“And the bed bug infestation?”

“A complete misunderstanding,” I say. “I was the one warning those kids to leave their pillows in the garbage dumpster.”

“Mr. Matthews, you are not taking responsibility for your involvement in any of these incidents.”

“That’s right,” I say. “Because I wasn’t responsible.”

“Clearly,” Glume says. “In fact, you don’t seem to be responsible for anything.”

“Whew!” I say, wiping my brow. “I was worried we wouldn’t understand each other.”

“Well, you’re in luck,” Glume says. “I do understand you. I understand you perfectly. And fortunately for you, you’ve come to the right place.”

“It sounds like it,” I say relieved. Just then, my

stomach rumbles. I can't remember the last time I ate. "Hey, this has been a great kumbaya session, but how about we wrap it up and head to the kitchen for a hearty breakfast?"

"Excellent idea, Mr. Matthews," Glume says. "We shall adjourn to the kitchen where we will begin your education."

"Great, I could eat a—wait, did you say education?"

"Oh, don't panic, Mr. Matthews," Glume says with a sinister smile. "Here at the New England School for Troubled Boys, you'll get a steady diet of exactly what you need."

"And what's that?" I ask suspiciously.

"Responsibility," he says.

"Is this the hilarious part?" I ask.

"I guess that depends on which side of the clipboard you're standing on," Glume answers. "Now you can choose to get up on your own or, if you would like, Mr. Snide would be more than happy to assist you."

The bald guy steps forward and I realize this could get real ugly real fast. But I'm not looking for any trouble.

"Okay, hold your horses, cue ball," I say, throwing my legs over the side. "There's no need to get personal. Let's get this education thing over with so I can eat."

\*\*\*

I don't think I've ever seen so many dishes in one



kitchen sink before. They're piled sky-high like Glume had been waiting for my arrival for weeks. And it isn't just plates. There are stacks of dirty cups, and hundreds of used forks and spoons scattered all over the place. At least they know enough to use plastic knives.

"Your first lesson begins now," Glume says gleefully. "Every one of these items needs to be hand-washed, hand-dried, and returned to its proper place."

"Hand washed?" I exclaim. "You mean, there's no dishwasher?"

"We just got a new one," Snide says, throwing a dish towel over my face. "Have fun."

"But... this will take hours," I say. "What about food?"

"Oh, you'll find plenty of leftovers," Glume says, "if you *lick* the plates clean. You'd best get started, Mr. Matthews. And please, no spots on the silverware."

As they exit, I hear them snickering down the hall. Well, this is a major bummer. I had hoped this would be a longer stop—get in a few square meals, sleep in a warm bed—but now I need to rethink my plans. After all, I didn't volunteer to be the resident Cinderella.

As I turn on the faucet, I catch my reflection in the stainless tea kettle. Not surprisingly, I look as tired as I feel. My skin is thin and pale, my dark hair is a tangled mess, and my eyes look like brown half-circles.

I take in the ceramic carnage around me and exhale.

I'm in no mood to do this chore the conventional

way, so I open the cabinets to see where everything is supposed to go, and peer over my shoulder to ensure the coast is clear.

Then, I get busy.

Remember those quirks I mentioned earlier? Well, sometimes they come in handy. Like right now.

You see, I have some strange abilities.

Super speed happens to be one of them.

Now I'm not claiming to be the Flash or anything, but I can really motor when I need to. I've never told anyone about it. I mean, people think I'm weird enough already. But when a situation calls for it and no one's around, I like to indulge a little.

The only problem is that using my super speed wipes me out. Especially if I haven't eaten in a while. But this task is simply too inhumane not to go for it.

So, despite some ear-jarring dish clinking, I manage to wash, dry, and put away every item in less than two minutes with no spots on the silverware. I stand back and admire my handiwork.

Even though I'm feeling drained, it was worth it. And the best part is that no one will be the wiser.

At least, that's what I think.

Until I turn around.

That's when I find a blond, curly-haired kid standing behind me with his jaw hanging open. He looks a few years younger than me, and he's holding a dirty plate.

I curse under my breath for being so careless.

Time to play it cool.

“Thanks,” I say, taking the plate out of his hands as if nothing happened. “I must have missed that one.”

I turn back to the sink and begin washing it—at normal speed. Okay, don’t panic. Maybe he didn’t see anything.

“D-Do you have superpowers?” he stammers.

Or maybe not.

“What are you talking about?” I say, grabbing the dish towel to start drying.

“Y-You just cleaned that mess up ridiculously fast,” he says. “I-I saw you do it.”

“Really?” I say, putting the plate away. I hate lying to the kid, but what choice do I have? “So, let me ask you something. If I could move like that, do you think I’d be hanging around this joy factory? Believe me, I’d take off so fast all you’d see is a cloud of dust.”

“Well,” the boy says, thinking it over, “I-I guess that’s true.”

“Believe me, I wish I had superpowers like that. Yet, here we are. Hey, are you feeling okay? You look kind of green. Maybe you need to sit down?”

The boy looks confused. “I... but... I... Maybe I’m not feeling so well.”

“Here,” I say, pulling over a chair from the table in the corner. “Take a load off.”

As he slumps down, I fill a glass with water and get him some ice. “Drink this. Maybe you’re dehydrated.

Kids today don't drink enough water."

"Thanks," he says, downing half the glass in one gulp. "Sorry, I... must be losing my mind."

"No problem," I say, taking a seat beside him and reaching out my hand. "My name is Abraham. But you can call me Bram."

"I'm Johnny," he says, shaking my hand. "You're that kid who came in late last night. With the police."

"The one and only," I say. "Sorry if I woke you."

"No big deal," he says. "I sleep with one eye open anyway. Have for a while."

"Yeah," I say. "I get it."

"So, how'd you end up here?" he asks, taking another sip.

"Incredible luck?" I say, causing Johnny to spit take.

"Seriously," I continue. "I don't know. I've been in foster care as long as I can remember. I've probably lived with twenty foster families. Eventually, no one wanted me anymore, so now I just kind of go from group home to group home."

"Twenty families?" he says, either shocked or impressed. "That's a lot of foster families."

"I guess," I say with a shrug. "I never really thought about it. I mean, it's all kind of a blur now. I just remember it was hard to keep track of all the different rules. What was okay in one house would be against the law in the next. I guess I never felt settled, you know? How about you? How'd you get here?"

“I got labeled a ‘bad kid’ a few years back,” he says, sitting back. “I had just gotten to a new family. Nice couple who already had a biological son. At first, I thought I had a chance. Well, I guess the kid wasn’t so happy I was there and claimed I stole his mom’s necklace. It was ridiculous. I’ve never stolen anything in my life! Anyway, he wasn’t going anywhere so I got the boot. Been here ever since.”

“That’s rough,” I say. “I can’t even tell you how many times I’ve been blamed for stuff I didn’t do. I actually had one parent tell me if her daughter and I were hanging off a cliff and she could only save one of us, she’d save her kid every single time. Like, isn’t that obvious? But I always wondered why she had to say it. It’s just cruel, you know?”

“I guess kids like us don’t get to have real families,” Johnny says, his face falling.

For some reason, his words hit me hard.

“Yeah,” I say. “I guess so.”

We sit in silence for a minute when I notice a newspaper on the table. The headline reads:

### GRAVE ROBBERS EXHUME BODY OF MILITARY HERO

“Well, that’s creepy,” I say.

“Yeah,” Johnny says. “It was all over the news. It was the grave of some old military sharpshooter who

helped win a bunch of wars. Someone dug him up and took all his bones. I think it's the second grave robbery in the last two weeks. People are weird."

"Totally weird," I agree, wondering why anyone would even think about doing something like that.

"Well, it's not so bad here," Johnny says, trying to change the subject. "As long as you follow the rules."

"Guess I'm in trouble then," I say. "Because I'm not much of a rule-follower."

"I wasn't either," he says. "Until I got here."

Just then, the door bursts open, and Snide barges in. "How're the chores go—What?"

The ogre stops short, taking in the scene.

"Oh, I'm all finished," I say quickly. "Guess I'm more of a Type A personality than I thought. I was just using my free time here to meet some of my fellow inmates."

"But that's impossible!" Snide says furiously. "You couldn't have done it all alone." Then, he wheels on Johnny. "You helped him!"

"No," I interject. "He didn't lift a finger."

"I think I'll be going now," Johnny says, standing up quickly. He shoots me a look, mouths 'good luck,' and makes a brisk exit.

"I don't believe you," the brute says.

"It's all in the magic of the suds," I claim, holding out my arms. "And look, no dish-pan hands."

"That's it, wise guy!" he says. "You're coming with

me!”

“To where?” I ask, as Snide opens the kitchen door and waves me into the hallway.

“You’ll see,” Snide says, as we walk down the hall and past an office where Glume is on the phone.

“Oh, yes, Officer Smith,” Glume says into the receiver. Then he catches sight of us and breaks into a weird smile. “Mr. Matthews is having a great time. He’s learning the ropes quickly.”

Snide chuckles and leads me down a flight of stairs.

“Hope you’re not afraid of the dark,” he says.

Well, he’s right about one thing, wherever he’s taking me is dark—pitch dark even. But not for me. For some reason, I’ve always been able to see perfectly in darkness. It’s like my eyes never need time to adjust. Of course, I have no idea why. I guess it’s just another one of my strange quirks.

But when we reach the bottom, Snide flicks on a dim light, and my stomach drops. The basement is totally creepy, with cement-block walls and a way-too-low ceiling. It smells musty down here, like mold has been brewing for centuries.

Then, I notice a row of steel doors lining the walls.

What are those for?

Snide reaches into his back pocket and pulls out a set of keys. As he jingles them around the ring, they echo through the narrow chamber. Finally, he finds the one he’s looking for.

“Um, is this some kind of a kid dungeon?” I ask. “Because I don’t think state-sponsored group homes are supposed to have kid dungeons.”

“You think you’ve got it all figured out, don’t you Matthews?” he says, unlocking the steel door to our left. “Well, keep thinking that way and you’re gonna have problems around here. Serious problems.”

“C’mon,” I plead, “you’re not really gonna—”

But before I can finish my sentence, he nudges me inside the tiny cell. And then he slams the door shut behind me.

Suddenly, a small slat opens at the top of the door, and Snide presses his ugly mug into the opening.

“Do you know what we do with problems here at the New England Home for Troubled Boys?”

I’m about to provide an eloquent response when I realize the question is rhetorical.

“We keep ‘em down here in solitary,” he says. “Until one way or another, they aren’t problems anymore.”

Then, he slams the slat closed.

And I’m locked inside.



## Foster Care Profile

Case No: 66649666

Name: MATTHEWS, ABRAHAM

Nickname(s): BRAM

Yrs in Care: 12 years

Difficulty: HIGH



### VITALS:

Height: 4'10"

Weight: 95lbs

Hair: Black

Eyes: Brown

### FOSTER CARE R

ARIZONA, PHOENIX

CALIFORNIA, SACRAMENTO

OREGON, SALEM

IDAHO, BOISE

NEVADA, RENO

CALIFORNIA, SACRAMENTO

UTAH, LOGAN

WYOMING, CASPER

NEW MEXICO, ALBUQUERQUE

PENNSYLVANIA, ERIE (ran away after 3 mo.)

(Please see pages 2-4 for additional foster locations)



**Matthews, Abraham (Bram)**

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### BREAKING AND EXITING

You'd be surprised how time doesn't fly when you're locked inside a basement prison cell.

Let's just say there's way too much time to think. In fact, I've spent so much time thinking, the mere thought of thinking absolutely exhausts me. Especially after holding a spirited debate with myself about whether I'm hungrier or thirstier. Now I fear I'm drifting into a dangerous state of delusion.

Case in point, there seems to be a hunk of crusty bread lying by the foot of the door. I haven't got the foggiest idea how it got there. I mean, I certainly would have noticed if someone had opened the door or dropped it through the slat.

Or would I?

I stare at the bread for a good long while, questioning if it's even real until I muster enough energy to poke it with my foot. The bread tumbles across the floor, hits the wall, and comes to a dead stop.

Okay, at least I'm not seeing things.

Unfortunately, the sight of the bread utterly repulses me. Look, I don't know why I can only eat red-colored food. Again, I had hours to contemplate that one too. My conclusion—I'm a freak. So, I'm clearly going to starve to death unless I can get out of here.

Looking up, I notice a small spider weaving an intricate web in the corner of the ceiling. For some reason, wherever I go spiders seem to follow.

Maybe they're my spirit insect.

I wonder why this one is so darn industrious. After all, there aren't any flies buzzing around. And every time I check in on the little guy, its web is not only getting larger, but closer. So, either we'll die in here together, or it's plotting to take early retirement from its largest catch ever—me!

So yeah, I'm a little delusional. But what happens next pushes me over the edge.

First, I hear little pitter-patter noises. Like something is scampering across the cement floor. I sit up and look around, but I don't see anything.

Then, they come into view.

Two hairy rats are inspecting the bread. One is tall and thin, the other small and fat. They sniff it with their pink noses, sinking their claws into the hard crust. They squeak back and forth, chattering away when suddenly their squeaks turn into... words?

“See here food me told you me smelt,” the fat one says.

“Right you be,” the thin one says, looking at me. “Pink one eat not.”

I clean out my ears with my fingers. Are they actually speaking English or am I actually nuts?

“Lose out does he,” the fat one says, taking a big bite. “Stupid maybe he be.”

“Blind maybe he be,” the thin one says, taking a bite of his own.

“Stupid and blind maybe he be,” the fat one says, and they both cackle at my expense.

Okay, that’s enough. After the day I’ve had I’m not about to sit here and get insulted by vermin.

So, I lean over and interject, “Pink one bread no like maybe?”

They freeze.

A piece of bread drops from the thin one’s mouth.

Then, they look at each other, and then back at me.

“P-Pink one talk us like?” the thin one stammers.

The fat one swallows hard and slowly backs up. “P-Pink one ... me understands?”

“Look, you can have the bread,” I say. “Seriously, I’m not going to eat it.”

“Impossible this be!” the thin one says.

“Unless ... unless ...” the fat one says, staring at me. Then, he takes off like his ears are on fire, disappearing through a narrow crevice between the cement blocks.

“Hey, wait!” I call out. “Unless what?” I look at the thin one. “What’s he talking about?”

The rat looks at me, then at the bread, then back at me. Then he grabs a chunk of crust and hightails it after his friend.

At this point, I realize my mind is playing tricks on me and I can't distinguish between fantasy and reality. I mean, I'm so far gone I'm speaking Rat!

Suddenly, the room starts spinning. I'm guessing starvation has finally caught up with me. My body starts trembling and I can't seem to keep my eyes open.

I'm losing consciousness.

Fading out.

I look up to say goodbye to my spider friend, but to my surprise, its web is still there, but the spider is gone.

Then, everything goes black.

\*\*\*

It takes all I have just to open my eyes, but the bright light overhead forces them closed again. My head is throbbing, and I feel like I've been run over by a steamroller. It's not until I try sitting up that I realize I'm not lying on a cement floor anymore, but on a bed. I'm tucked under the covers and my head is resting on a soft pillow. I try propping up again, but I don't get far.

"Take it easy," comes a familiar voice.

I pry my eyes open to find Johnny sitting beside me. He's holding out a plate with something red on it.

Swedish Fish candies!

“H-How did you know?” I ask.

“You kept moaning for something red to eat,” Johnny says. “I didn’t have much time, so I snuck down to the kitchen and grabbed these. Although technically I’m not sure Swedish Fish actually qualify as food.”

“It’s perfect,” I say, inhaling the delicious treats. After being so hungry for so long, I can feel the sugar entering my bloodstream, re-energizing my body. “Where am I? What are you doing here?”

“After you passed out, they pulled you out of the dungeon and brought you back to your room. I felt bad seeing what they did to you. So, after everyone went to bed, I snuck in to check on you. But I can’t stay long. Snide’s on night duty.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I catch a digital clock sitting on a desk. It reads: 12:49 am. It’s the middle of the night. “How long was I down there?”

“Sixteen hours,” Johnny says. “I think that’s a record. By the way, why do you only eat red stuff?”

“Because I’m weird,” I say, swallowing the last Swedish Fish. “Thanks for getting this for me. I was starving.”

“Clearly,” Johnny says. “They put all the new kids in the dungeon. Although they usually spring them after four hours. So, you must have made one heck of a first impression.”

“Well, my first impression will be my last,” I say. “Because I’m getting out of here. ASAP.”

“What?” Johnny says. “Are you nuts? Where are you going to go?”

“Doesn’t matter,” I say, peeling back the covers and getting to my feet. I stand up, although I feel pretty shaky. “But wherever I’ll be, it won’t be here.”

“But how will you survive?” Johnny asks. “If you’re here, at least you’ve got food and shelter.”

“Let’s get something straight,” I say, looking him straight in the eyes. “Some things are more important than food and shelter. Just because they put every kid in a dungeon doesn’t make it okay. We’re human beings, not monsters.”

Johnny’s lips quiver as he tries to respond, but he can’t. I didn’t mean to upset him, but what’s happening here isn’t right. It’s like the old story of the frog and the pot of boiling water. If you put the frog straight into a pot of boiling water, it’ll feel the heat and jump right out. But if the frog is put into warm water and you turn up the heat slowly, the frog won’t notice the temperature rising and will end up being boiled alive.

Johnny’s been here so long everything seems normal to him, but I’m not going to wait around until I get cooked. I look out the window. We’re on the third floor, which is way too high to jump. If I’m going to make my exit, I’ll have to do it through the front door.

Which means I’ll need to dodge Snide.

“Thanks for your help,” I say, grabbing my gray hoodie from the back of the door. “Do you want to come

with me?”

At first, Johnny looks stunned by my question. Then, he sits quietly for a moment, deep in thought.

“No, but thanks,” he says finally. “I kind of watch over some of the smaller guys here. I guess this is my home now.”

His answer doesn’t surprise me. Kids like us tend to accept our situations, no matter how bad they may be. But over time I’ve learned to follow my instincts on what I think is right, not comfortable. Still, I can’t just leave him and the other kids in this horrible mess.

Then, I get an idea.

“Don’t worry,” I say. “I’ll help you out before I go.”

“Thanks,” he says. “So, is this the part where I see a cloud of dust?”

I smile. Clearly, I never had him fooled.

“Something like that,” I say. “Take care of yourself.”

He nods, and I enter the hall.

It’s pitch black, but again, darkness isn’t a problem for me. Johnny was right though. I could turn on my super speed and make a clean getaway, but I plan on saving it for later. After all, that’s how I ended up here in the first place. I got too tired to outrun the police.

Since everyone is asleep, I tiptoe down the stairs, passing Glume’s room on the second floor. The door is cracked and old shark-face is peacefully snoring away. Sleep while you can because your whole world is about to change.



When I reach the bottom step, I have a clear pathway to the front door. My instincts tell me to go for it, but I can't. I promised Johnny I'd help him out.

So, I turn the corner and head for the office. The door is open, and the lights are on, but no one is inside. Snide must be doing his rounds.

I enter the room and duck behind the desk. Then, I pop up to dial the phone and pull the receiver back down with me. The phone rings once before someone picks up.

"This is 9-1-1, how can we assist you?" the female operator says.

"Yes, hi, I'm calling from the New England Home for Troubled Boys. I'd like to report on the improper treatment of children here."

"Are you a child?" the operator asks, her voice sounding surprised.

"Yes," I say. "I'm a resident here."

"Oh," she says. "What kind of improper treatment?"

I don't have much time, so I cut to the chase. "Just get the police here. Tell them to go straight to the basement. There's a kid dungeon down there no one knows about. You'll see. Just hurry."

"I've already sent a notification to the police," the operator says. "They should be there shortly. Are you okay? Can I have your name?"

I think about giving my name, but instead, I say, "Look, I represent all the kids here. Good kids that just need a helping hand."

Then, I hang up. I need to split before Snide shows up. But when I leap back into the hallway, I discover a large figure blocking my path to the front door.

Snide!

“What were you doing in my office, Matthews?”

“I’m a night owl, remember?”

The oaf smiles. “Are you looking for your file, Matthews? Are you trying to find out why no one loves you?”

“Shut up, Snide,” I say.

“That’s Mr. Snide,” he says.

“Shut up, Mr. Snide,” I say.

“Well, I’ll tell you something you probably didn’t know,” Snide says. “Because I did a little research on you myself.”

“Congratulations,” I say. “Because I didn’t think Neanderthals could read.”

“Ha,” Snide says. “Then I guess you’re not interested in what I found out. It’s about your daddy.”

He stands there with a big, stupid grin on his face. He’s baiting me. Sucking me in. But what could he have found out about my dad? I mean, he’s long dead.

“Okay,” I say, my curiosity getting the best of me. “I’ll bite, what is it?”

“Get this,” Snide says, folding his immense arms. “You weren’t put into foster care by just anyone. Your very own father dropped you into the system.”

What?

I'm stunned. That's not what I'd been told. I was told my parents died in a fire that I somehow survived, and then I was put into foster care. So, what he's saying can't be true.

"You're lying," I say.

"Am I, Matthews?" he says. "Well, I did some digging. Your case is so darn thick and convoluted it took a while. But I went all the way back and found your very first record and guess what? Your daddy's signature was right on it. Mr. Gabriel Matthews. He gave you away like a smelly carpet."

No way. That's impossible.

"Must be tough," Snide continues, "but I guess you can say you've been unwanted your whole life."

"Liar!" I yell, red hot. All I want to do is get out of here, but Snide is blocking the hallway.

"Now go back to your room, Matthews," he orders.

"No," I answer.

"I was hoping you'd say that," he says.

Then, he cracks his knuckles, and charges at me!

Without thinking, I react.

Just before Snide reaches me, I turn on my super speed and somersault between his legs in a flash. Snide thunders over me and crashes into a table which breaks beneath his considerable weight.

"I don't know how you did that," he says, standing up, his muscles rippling. "But you're going to pay."

If he catches me, he'll tear me limb from limb.

Suddenly, the hall light clicks on.

“Snide?”

That’s Glume’s voice!

“Snide, what’s all the ruckus?”

As Snide looks up, I realize this may be my only chance. The Swedish Fish aren’t going to last in my system for long, so my speed powers will be nearing the end of their shelf life. If I’m getting out it has to be now!

I bolt down the hall and plow into the front door, knocking it clear off its hinges. Oh well, I guess Glume can add that to my list of property damage. My shoulder is throbbing but I don’t stop. I book down the street as fast as I can, my speed waning with every step. When I think I’m a good enough distance away, I duck behind a parked pickup truck.

Just then, I hear SIRENS—police sirens!

Four patrol cars pull up in front of the group home. I peer around the truck as a bunch of police officers sprint up the front steps, disappearing through the open door frame I left behind. I watch anxiously from my hiding spot, hoping the boys in blue got my instructions.

After what seems like an eternity, there’s movement.

First, I see Glume, and then Snide. They’re being led out of the building—in handcuffs!

It worked!

Suddenly, boys spill out of the house onto the front steps. They all look shell-shocked as they watch Glume and Snide get pushed into the back of a police car. But

there's one boy in the middle of the pack who is wearing a different expression.

He has blond, curly hair. And he's smiling.

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As I roam the city in the dead of night, I'm feeling pretty lost. After all of this, there's no way I can ever go to another group home again. Plus, I'm pretty sure if the police catch me, I'll be charged with reverse breaking and entering.

So, for the first time, I'm truly on my own.

And what's worse, I can't stop thinking about what Snide said. Was everything I thought I knew about my life a lie? Did my father really put me into foster care? Did my parents really not want me?

Suddenly, a HOWL in the distance snaps me back to reality. It sounds like a wounded dog. Looking around, I realize I wandered into a graveyard of all places.

Lucky me.

I keep walking, reading the tombstones around me. Some are really old, like as far back as the 1800s. Then, I remember that eerie story about the graverobbers and a chill runs down my spine.

I can keep going, but I'm pretty hungry. If I don't eat something soon, I'll pass out. But the graveyard just seems to go on and on, and my chances of finding a pizza joint in a place like this are slim to none.

I turn to head back when another HOWL pierces the night air, making the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. That one seemed a lot closer than the last one.

Looking up, I realize there's a full moon.

Wonderful.

I pull my hood over my head and start walking double time. To my relief, I finally find the exit and step through the gates, only to hear RUSTLING behind me.

I spin around and gasp.

Because standing in front of me is a hunched figure.

At first, I think it's a man, but there's something wrong with his head. Then, he steps onto the pavement and I realize it isn't a man at all. His head is shaped like a wolf, and every inch of his muscular body is covered in matted, brown fur.

My jaw hits the floor.

Holy cow!

I can't believe what I'm seeing.

It's a... a... werewolf?!?

The beast stares at me with his bright red eyes as a long string of drool drips from the corner of his mouth, splattering onto the pavement.

I want to move, but I'm glued to the spot.

Then, he lets out an ear-piercing HOWL.

And to my horror, several creatures HOWL back.

# MONSTEROLOGY 101 FIELD GUIDE

## WEREWOLF

### CLASSIFICATION:

Type: Shapeshifter  
Sub-Type: Lycanthrope  
Height: Variable  
Weight: Variable  
Eye Color: Red  
Hair Color: Variable

### KNOWN ABILITIES:

- Transformations typically occur during a full moon
- Superhuman Strength, Speed, Reflexes, Agility, and Healing
- Heightened Sight, Smell and Hearing

### KNOWN WEAKNESSES:

- Vulnerable to silver objects (e.g. bullets or blades)
- Susceptible to injury in human form
- Wolfsbane is rumored to reverse lycanthropy

### DANGER LEVEL:

HIGH



### TIPS TO AVOID AN UNWANTED ENCOUNTER:

- Remain inside during a full moon
- Mask your scent
- Travel in large crowds
- Stay far away from wooded areas

