

FRED and the MONSTER

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Fred and the Monster

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It was nighttime, and Fred was going to sleep.



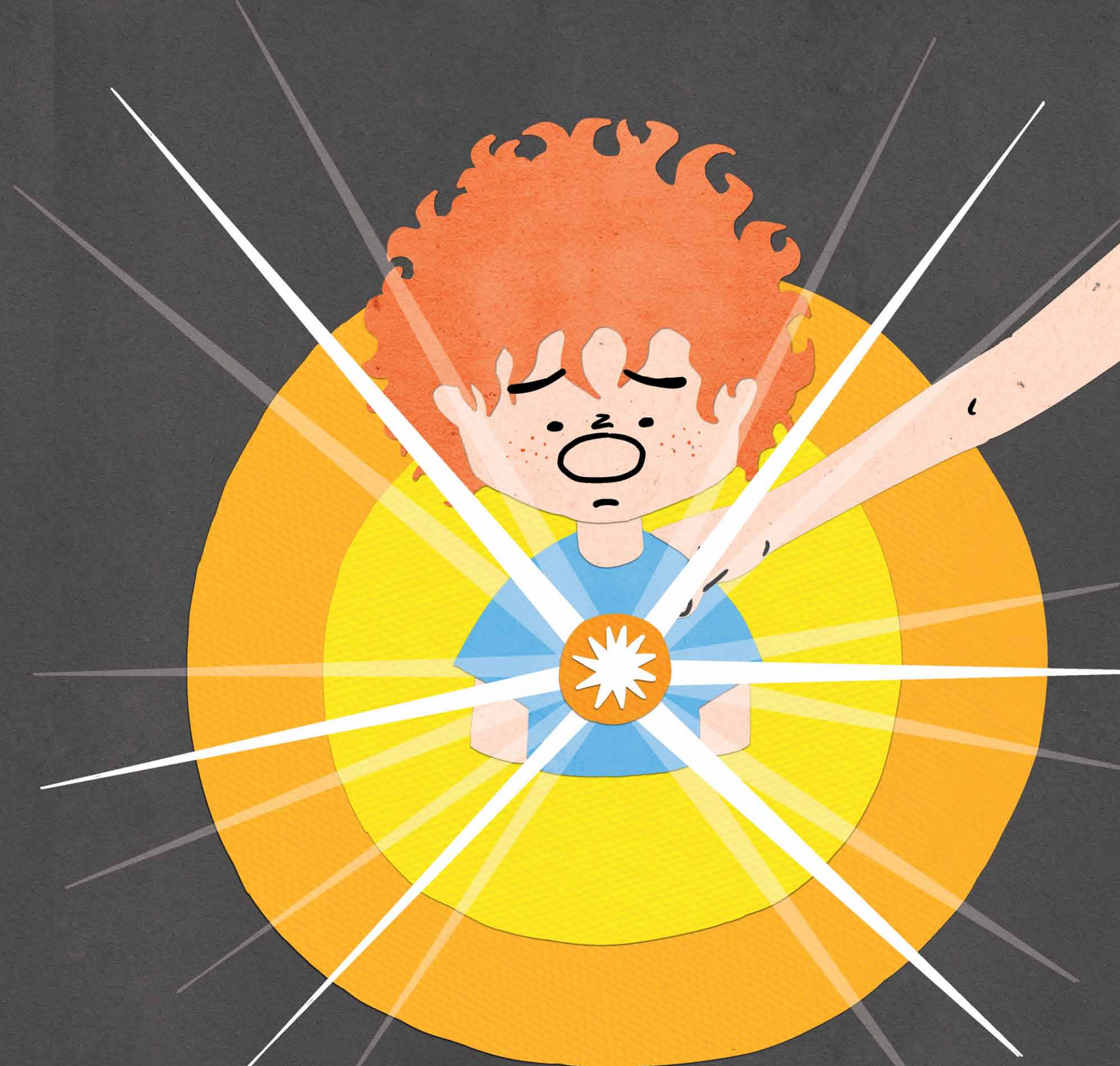


"But Mom," he said, "can't I sleep with the lights on? Just once more?"

"You said that last night," said Fred's mom, "and the night before that. It's time you slept with the lights off like big boys do."

"But I'm afraid."

Placing a hand on Fred's shoulder, she said, "Inside of you there's a spark of courage. Find it. Then you'll see there's nothing to be afraid of."



Fred was silent as his mom kissed his forehead. She pulled up the sheets to his chin and turned off the light. As the door closed behind her, darkness surrounded him like a bat's wings.

Immediately, familiar sounds turned into frightening noises. Chirping crickets sounded like ghosts dragging chains. Croaking frogs became growling goblins.



As branches swayed and brushed against the window, Fred imagined monsters clawing the latch, ready to carry him away to the horrible lands they came from.

For more than an hour he tossed and turned, expecting gremlins to crawl through the electrical outlets.



Fred's eyelids had grown heavy when he heard the sound of teeth chattering. Someone—or something—was under his bed!



His heart started hammering. He was about to scream for his mom when a gruff voice spoke, freezing the words in his throat.

“C-c-could you p-please turn on a l-l-light?”

Fred's skin tingled as if a spider were crawling up his spine.

“P-p-please,” the voice continued, “I'm af-f-f-f-fraid.”

Biting his lower lip, Fred grabbed the flashlight from his bedside table. Slowly, he bent over the mattress and peeked under the bed.

There, hugging its tail to its chest, was the strangest creature. Shaped like a watermelon, it had carrot-colored skin and one eye in the center of its face. It had a thumb-sized horn on its head, and a single fang hanging from the corner of its mouth.



Fred screamed and fell out of bed. Striking the floor, he dropped the flashlight.



Terrified, he scrambled to retrieve the flashlight, but to his surprise when the beam shined in the monster's eye, the monster threw up its arms and rolled into a ball.



"Please don't hurt me!" it said, sobbing.

"You're afraid of me?" Fred asked.

Too frightened to look up, the monster nodded as tears streamed down its face.

"But you're a monster," Fred said. "You're not supposed to be afraid of anything."

The monster sniffed and wiped its eye.



"Here," Fred said, grabbing a tissue. But as he reached forward to hand the tissue to the monster, the monster scampered into a corner, trembling.

"What are you so scared of?"



"Everything," it said. "Especially the dark. Darkness is dangerous in my swamp." The monster looked up. "There are ferocious alligators, poisonous snakes, and stinging bees. Not to mention razor-sharp rocks and jagged stick bushes. And what if I got lost? Or fell off a cliff? The swamp is so cold and wet, but here under your bed I'm warm and safe. Best of all, there's always a light on. At least there was . . . Until tonight."



Remembering his mother's words, Fred said, "There's a spark of courage inside you. Find it. Then you won't be afraid."



"You think so?" the monster asked.

"I know so," Fred said, feeling calmer himself.



"Come on, I'll show you!"

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