

# **Of Monsters, Math and Magic**

(bedtime poetry for the restless dreamer)

## **Before you sleep**

make sure to check  
what's under your bed.

Two things are bound to happen:  
You will spot a monster,  
or not.

If you do not spot a monster,  
say a short prayer of thanks,  
then go straight to sleep.  
But be sure  
to have your toes  
safely tucked in your sheets.

If you do spot a monster,  
it will either be friendly,  
or not.

If it is friendly, ask it questions:  
What did it have for breakfast?  
Does it have a little monster pet?  
Are monster schools any different  
from human schools?  
Swap stories and silly jokes.

Now, if it is not friendly,  
if it is the other kind,  
the horrible, terrible kind...  
SCREAM!  
Scream as loud as you can,  
Scream until your lungs feel like bursting.

Three things are bound to happen:  
You will either scare it away,  
or your parents will come just in time  
to shoo it away, or,  
regrettably,  
the monster will eat you,

but that would have happened anyhow  
once you were asleep, and your toes are not  
safely tucked in your sheets.

## **The Thing Inside My Closet**

At exactly dead-of-the-night o'clock  
and the house sleeps  
with a rickety-rackety wheezing,  
I wake and hear the breathing  
of the thing that's hiding  
inside my closet—

Sometimes it mumbles, sometimes it growls,  
Sometimes it threatens, sometimes it snores.

Sometimes, it only stares.

## **Something**

Something knocks on my door  
Something skips across the floor

Something rustles in the dark  
Something causes my dog to bark

Something grows, drawing nearer  
Something emerges from my mirror

Something whispers in my ear  
Something tells me, *have no fear*

## **She Keeps A Secret Box**

made of cardboard,  
its edges fuzzed from overuse.  
It houses dust, tiny trinkets and monsters,  
those that had slipped from other dimensions  
and found their way  
into our earthly realm.

Some crawl in slow slimy pace,  
others with tiger-like teeth run amok,  
but soon enough they understand  
to never bite or hurt her.

That for all their mangled limbs  
and fire-scorched skin,  
for all their devious plans  
and fascinations with the apocalypse,

she was their friend.

They realize that her gentle hands  
were worth retracting venomous claws,  
and delaying the end of the world for,  
and that maybe, just maybe,  
there were better things  
than reckless rampaging:

for instance, her sudden bursting  
into raucous laughter.

But always, a day comes when the monsters  
grew too big for the cardboard box to hold.  
They leave in a flurry of groans and roars,  
black-backed and fanged,  
still beast-like in form

but inside, so much more.

## **The Mathemagician**

Across scattered lights, beyond the atmosphere,  
there are equations and wordsongs only she knows,  
for the cycling of stuff finer than gossamer  
or the rotational symmetries of shadows.

She whispers dreams anchored between sky and sea,  
existing outside timeflow yet bounded within it.  
The manifold unfolding, only she could see,  
numbers' fevered swirls to infinity's last whit.

As the magic flares within and around her, she wraps  
herself in the sleekest night, and waits for the collapse.

## **Caught In Zeno's Crazy Corridor**

Question: Maryam tries to cross a crazy corridor. But before she reaches the other end, she has to walk half the distance, then a quarter of it, then an eighth, then a sixteenth, and so on. How long will it take her to cross that crazy corridor, so she can get to her Math class and play with numbers some more?

Answer: Unfortunately, Maryam may never ever cross that crazy corridor! But, as she comes ever so close to the middle of it, she might as well tear a hole in the patchwork fabric of our reality, let the space grow ever larger and swallow us whole. There, she'll have all the time to play with numbers, and then some more!

## **Never Argue With A Möbius Strip**

"I had an argument with a Möbius," Sofia once confided.  
She was seething with anger, for it was truly one-sided!

I asked if the Möbius listened to her points at least,  
"No—it just kept on talking circles! That boisterous beast!"

I felt sorry for her unfortunate encounter with topology.  
Sofia sighed and said, "I better get an apology!"

**$\pi$**

3. then a parade of partying digits with no general mechanical means for predicting the next kinetic term accumulating, traversing, designing the stairway to a bloated bottomless beyond! Oh what great shell of an irrational universe, encompassing every fiber, every atom, every thought, every memory, every laughter, when translated into numeric codes. Cozily snuggled in this cosmic tail-end, we live as constants within an infinity...

## **Teaching My Cat How To Fly**

Blow yourself up with both front paws,  
eyes wide, limbs unnotched to full swing.

Imagine a thin yet sturdy trapeze,  
hold on to it, with grace and ease.

Prop yourself to a full somersault,  
but, please, don't get dizzy when you bolt.

Then fly up to the night sky and laugh  
at the moon's hidden bald patches.

## **Sorrows of a Sea-witch**

West over shores, over water, the light once plum  
turns midnight blue; the moon shines over  
my blighted plot of land, illuminating skull  
bones, thorns, thickets and bottled enchantments.

Girl says, "Sea-witch, listen, I've travelled many mountains,  
swam through tangled mangrove roots to reach you.  
I've braved ancient creatures, some with no name.  
Will you let me tell you my grief?  
so I leave unburdened?"

I scrub the ocean floor with octopus ink, capture  
glowing fish to put them in a storm-song:  
fair weathers, mage wind, may sailors come back home.

While pouty girls such as this come knocking,  
wanting to walk on land, flitter about, sing  
a song for a lover – always for a lover!

How much blood for your whispered wishes?  
For my skill, my noble arts, come with hefty price.

## **When My Mother Sings**

The wind sings with her, carrying  
yellowed pages bridging myth and history.

Verses dance past her lips,  
and I see: wild waves, scaly beings,  
stubborn vintas and proud sails!

Oh, how her body sways,  
Oh, how her voice lilts,

Then a distant drum starts beating:

I. Am. Free.

### **Lola Maria's Candles**

There is a magical stillness about the air  
that envelopes this tiny island at night  
when everyone else is asleep:  
the swooshing and swishing of gentle waves,  
the distant calls from leaving mariners,  
the cooing pigeons perched on Fort Pilar's  
moss-covered walls and then,

Lola Maria strikes the first match and lights  
the first candle of the night.

See, most candles are just candles,  
those that give us light to see more clearly,  
or go with our prayers so wishes come swiftly.  
But not Lola Maria's candles;  
this, little Marlot knows —a knowledge she held dearly!

An orange one is said to give us joy and energy,  
but also it is one that turns into a rocket ship  
that zooms across the sky of Zamboanga  
so that twinkling stars are within reach,  
and the moon's stubby little nose can be pinched.

In front of doorsteps green candles are lit,  
to bring in wealth and good fortune.  
But little Marlot lights them between  
two century-old trees instead, so the whiff  
forms into a cloudy hammock  
where you can swing in the woods at ease,  
and count all the birds and know their names



and name all the birds that have yet no names.

Blue candles call upon peace and patience,  
but to little Marlot, it is the color  
of a powerful element: water.  
So she chants the right words,  
and stands before the sea, candle in hand.  
A spherical object emerges: her own bubble submarine!  
It cuts through the ocean, down to the bottom,  
where she meets creatures of old,  
some friendly, some cold.

Light purple candles to reach one's ambitious goals.  
But Marlot lights three purple ones before a mirror,  
at half past eleven, then traces a secret figure.  
In a snap, she wears a rainbow-crown in a world  
with sweetened milk rivers and lollipop hills,  
where winged snakes talk, and sheeps come in aquamarine.  
They all bow before her, their very own fairy-queen!

Now, black candles, are powerful ones  
in fighting negative energy.  
But Lola Maria's black candles allow us to see  
loved ones no longer with us,  
so long as your heart is pure and true.  
When little Marlot lights black candles,  
a tiny, dozing silhouette appears nearby,  
but always out of reach.  
Still, little Marlot's heart swells up at the image,  
her own little guardian angel, at peace in slumber land.

And alas, white candles, the color of precious pearls,  
are lit for a safe return —even after ventures  
up to the moon, down to the seafloor,  
in fanciful lands and secret kingdoms —  
and for making sure summoned spirits go  
back to their realms.

So that the sound of lapping waves,  
cooing pigeons, and leaving mariners,  
are all that can be heard, back in the tiny island.  
As Lola Maria plants a kiss on little Marlot's forehead,  
the little girl smiles as she feels the magic  
in the stillness of the air.