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Elmo is Sleeping

Katherine Williams

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Elmo is sleeping

It's 11:40 in the morning, and Elmo is sleeping. I put him to sleep not long after my daughter finally closed her eyes, because I can't stand the way he looks at me with those big, bulgy monster eyes when Alissa's not around. It's not that I don't like Elmo; in fact, I think he's pretty cute some of the time, but when the house gets quiet and the only two things moving are me and a small red furry monster, I get the weirdest feeling that he's more than he's

cracked up to be. Not really threatening (I think that would be going a bit too far) but mildly menacing, in a childish, bully-cum-watchdog sort of way. Anyway, he gives me the creeps, so I put him to sleep. I think I'm going to have to do something about him soon, before it's too late.

Elmo came to live with us not long after Alissa was born. In my infinite, new-mother wisdom I decided that since I had an impressionable young



mind in the house, I should stop watching Bryant and Katie every morning while I ate breakfast. So, Alissa swinging away in her Swyng-O-Matic, I turned the channel to our local public television station and invited Big Bird, Oscar, and the rest of the bunch into our home, two hours a day, every day of the week. Most of them were decent enough to go away when I flicked off the set, but Elmo was different, right from the start. He'd hang around the swing, talking a mile a minute; I swear, he never shut up. He'd watch Alissa click back and forth, and back and forth, and when the swing wound down and Alissa started to fuss, he'd wind it back up again. This was all right with me; he wasn't much trouble, and I liked the idea that someone I could trust was watching over my daughter. All right, I know he's got the mind and temperament of a three-year-old, but even three-year-olds can be helpful at times, and I had a lot on my mind, what with my first novel coming out soon and running the house and keeping my husband happy. You know how it is—you let things slide until you really must handle them, and then you take care of them all at once. Well, I thought I had the Elmo thing under control, so I just left it alone.

Only it wasn't under control. Before I knew it, he was hanging around almost all day, following Alissa around the house, eating all my Zwieback toast, and generally getting underfoot. I've tried talking to him, but you know what it's like talking to a three-year-old: it's practically impossible to make anything stick. I've even pulled out the "your mommy must be missing you" schtick but he doesn't buy it: the wonderful folks on the Street have thoughtfully forgotten to give him a mother, so my guilt trips don't work worth a damn. He just looks at me and laughs in that irritating way he's got, then scampers off to find Alissa. I think I've let him hang around so long because Alissa likes him, and he makes her laugh. Plus, I don't think I'd have been able to manage

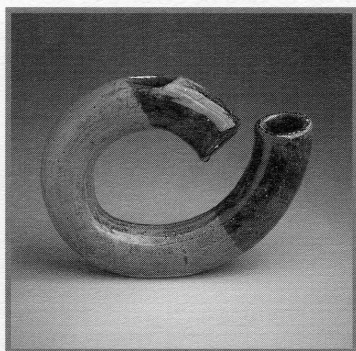
everything without him. This truly bothers me. I mean, it brings up those good old feelings of inadequacy that my mother so dutifully installed in me years ago. I guess she didn't know what to do with her guilt once I grew up, so she passed it on to me, bless her soul. Anyway, having Elmo around for the most part has been okay, but like I said before, he's starting to give me the creeps.

Things started changing about six months ago, around the time Alissa took her first steps. I think I first felt that little twinge of jealousy when she walked to Elmo and not to me. I jokingly said something along the lines of, "Alissa, honey, don't you want Mommy to help you instead of Elmo? He's pretty small to be helping you," and Elmo turned to look at me with those huge, unblinking, white plastic orbs, and I swear to God he bristled at me! The sensation passed pretty quickly, but I still get the shivers, thinking about it.

And then something else happened to make me think this was getting out of hand. I'd put Alissa down for a nap almost an hour earlier and was busy fixing lunch for us all when I got the oddest feeling. My mother would have said someone was walking on her grave, and that's probably the only way I can describe it. I turned around, and there was Elmo, standing behind me with a kitchen knife in his hand, watching me in complete silence. I have no idea how long he'd been standing there (monster feet don't make a sound on linoleum) or how he got that knife down off the counter, but it was just plain weird! I asked him to give me the knife, and I think for a minute he actually thought of disobeying me, but eventually he handed it over and walked away. That's when I found out I could put him to sleep. I just wished, firmly and with a bit of "mother's getting mad" in my voice, that he'd take a nap, too, and he just fell over without a peep in the middle of the hall,

dead asleep. I had to walk over and make sure he was still breathing, after I got over my surprise. This technique still works, but I've found that I've got to get just a little madder each day for it to take effect. So, the upshot of it is that I've now got to practically shout at the little red devil for him to drop off, but it's worth risking waking up Alissa. He really does give me the willies when she's not around, you know?

And, to make matters worse, I think he's stealing from us. Yes, the same monster that so cheerfully and willingly helps his little friends learn morals and proper behavior on practically every Sesame Street episode ever produced is actually stealing from me! I've caught him with his hands in my jewelry box more than once, and although I've not actually caught him with his little red mitts on the goods, I'm missing a few junk jewelry pieces that I



haven't worn in ages. It's just weird-why would he want my jewelry? I think he's also pinched a few dollars out of my purse, and once I caught him on a chair trying to get to Jim's handgun box in our closet. That scared me, and I scolded him roundly for it, but it didn't seem to sink in. He just stared at me like he always does with that glint of malfeasance in his cold eyes, and so I put him to sleep, right then and there. He fell off the chair in mid-snore and, of course, that made me feel guilty, so I put him in our bed and watched him for a while to make sure he wasn't hurt. Later, I had to laugh. Really...feeling guilty over a

stuffed puppet! Alissa certainly seems to love him, and I wouldn't want to have his 100% polyester stuffing on my hands. But then again, if he'd reached that gun box....

Alissa's waking up. I can hear her on the baby monitor moving and snuffling around in her crib. I'm going to have to make a decision soon as to what to do with Elmo; things just can't continue like they've been going. For one thing, I've decided to go back to work at the publishing company to help make ends meet, and I really don't want the babysitter to freak out the first time Elmo steps out of the TV and asks for a Zwieback. And the other reason, well, let's just say that I think things have gone a bit too far. Alissa won't play with any of her other little friends, and all my attempts at asking Elmo to stay home once in a while just aren't working. I suppose I could just stop letting Alissa watch Sesame Street, but it's her favorite program, bar none, and I know I don't have the will power to leave the TV off, even for a day. I've gotten too used to hearing it on in the family room, hour after hour, even if it is public television, and I never really watch it. I mean, it makes me feel like someone's here in the house with me all day, keeping me company. God knows, Alissa isn't exactly what you could call a great conversationalist, especially since she spends so much time playing with that damned ball of red fur.

I can hear Elmo stirring now, too, whispering to Alissa from his bed next to hers. I can just imagine the two of them with their heads close together and Elmo's bulging white eyes glimmering in the half-dark of her room. If I close my eyes it makes me think of conspirators and dark scary things and shining knives, but then I shake myself and think, come on, he's only a monster from a children's television program, and what on earth have I got to fear from that?