

BATHROOM MONSTERS

David Darrell

"Bye, Mom," I said kissing her on the cheek.

"Bye, Daddy," I said a bit more awkwardly as he bumped out the door, a suitcase in each hand.

I went over to the living room window and leaned over the back of the couch and watched my Mom and Daddy get into the airport limousine and start away on their trip to the Bahamas. There fell a sudden emptiness in the house but it didn't touch me for long. Nothing touches a ten-year-old boy for long.

A mischievous desire came into my mind and I darted out of the living room and to the short flight of carpeted stairs that led upstairs. I didn't quite make it.

"Jimmy," came my Aunt Stephanie's slow singsong voice, "where are you going in such a rush? And you shouldn't run in the house." She spoke in such a way that even I could tell she wanted to be firm in her responsibility in watching over me for the next four days but felt she shouldn't intrude too much as a guest. Boy! This was going to be a fun vacation. I could feel that Aunt Stephanie would be easy to handle.

"Just up to my secret laboratory," I replied finally.

"Well," she said, her eyebrows going up but a smile coming to her lips, "just don't make a mess. You wouldn't want your mother to find a mess when she gets home."

"I won't," I assured her as I continued up the stairs. In the little square hallway at the top I turned left to a closed door with a cardboard sign on it. It read:

SECRET LABORATORY

Enter at your own risk!!!

Keep out! Top Secret!

I went in and shut the door behind me. It was really only a bathroom, of course. But I had converted it into a most efficient laboratory. A plastic bucket and assorted cups stood to the left of the sink. Behind them was a rack of very realistic looking test tubes I had

taken from my brother's chemistry set. There was also a funnel, some spoons and straws, a collection of bottles of all sorts of weird shapes and sizes, and a hollow tube plastic jump rope, which went from inside the bucket into the toilet to the left.

A quite complete laboratory, I thought. And I built it all myself. I looked into the bucket. It had only a couple inches of water, I mean H_2O , in it now—I had drained off the rest through the jump-rope into the toilet (all laboratories always did that). I moved to an assortment of jars to the right of the sink—my supplies and chemicals. Now that Mom and Daddy were gone, I had a lot more I dared use.

I took a little tin box marked "Anacin" and took out one of the atomic pills. I put it in a spoon and then fit another spoon on top and crushed the pill. I had seen my mother do this once, and it all fascinated me how well it worked. I took a little of the atomic crystals and added it to the O_2H —er, H_2O —and threw the rest down the sink. It occurred to me I should have measured it more carefully. That would have been more scientific, but it didn't really matter since I didn't know what I was making yet.

I searched now for some of my more potent chemicals. There was a long-necked bottle of pink Helena Rubenstein hand lotion. This was a code name actually for the chemical name spelled backward. What this really was was Nietsnebur Aneleh acid. I poured a little of this into one of the many containers, which I dug out of the waistbasket; this one shaped like an old-fashioned milk container only smaller. From this I poured the acid carefully into a test tube and then added some Pepto Bismal (no need to reverse that name!).

Leaving this solution, I took some McKesson's Rosewater Gel (a secret extract from rose petals discovered by scientist McKesson, naturally) and some very rare and potent Mineral Oil, mixed them together in an old bird feed jar, and poured the contents into another test tube, although the gel gave me some trouble. Now, the dangerous part. Using the funnel for safety, I poured about half of the acidic contents of the first tube into the second. Finally, I took one of the straws and sucked the molasses-like stuff in the second test tube part way up its length (I had seen this done by my doctor many times after he took some blood from my finger) and transferred it to the big bucket. Or perhaps I should call it a tank—a chemical tank sounds good. The—the H_2O turned a satisfying dull red. The first part of my formula was complete. But that's all I'm going to tell you because, after all, it's my secret formula.

Anyway, you get the idea of how skillful and careful I work, though I admit I don't take very good notes—it's too much trouble to spell. But I'm a dedicated scientist and I worked all the way until Aunt Stephanie called us for dinner.

I didn't get back to my secret laboratory that evening because Bobby came over to play and then I wanted to see my favorite show: "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea." Before I knew it Aunt Stephanie was making me go to bed. I think 8:00 is a rotten time to go to bed.

I just had one more chance to check the tank. It was half full of a thick, lumpy fluid of a neutral tan-orange color I hadn't been able to change. I could barely see a white film on the bottom and as I turned to go I thought I saw a rippling shudder disturb the surface. It was a little scary and I closed the door tight.

I had some trouble getting to sleep. I always do after watching "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea." I used to have some real nightmares after watching it or especially after "Outer Limits." My parents even stopped me from watching them for awhile but eventually I got over it. What I would do is, whenever a monster came on, I would look at everything that was funny about it. I remember on one episode of "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea" they found some little things that looked like pine needles at the North Pole or something and put them in glasses of some clear chemical. Then when everyone was asleep, the chemical started to bubble and the needle to grow until a long arm of it crawled out of the glass and just kept growing. It crawled around and killed a lot of people until they killed it, I can't remember how. To me it looked like a long strand of garland, like you put on Christmas trees only made out of rubber and all curled about itself.

Oh, this was a mistake. I went and got myself thinking about all that; no wonder I can't get to sleep. I've got too big an imagination. That's what Mom always tells me.

"What—what—Oh, no!" I began to calm down. I must have got to sleep after all because it was only a dream. The whole house was dark and quiet. I hate it when nightmares wake me up in the middle of the night. It's so still. I feel like I'm all alone. Just me and the night. Boy, am I sweating.

I pulled the covers around me. I couldn't help looking toward the crack of the door beyond which was the hall and my secret laboratory. I actually shuttered. In my dream everyone had been asleep. But in the bathroom my secret formula had begun to bubble and then something

had grown out of it, had squeezed under the door. I shivered again. The first person it would want to kill would be me. Monsters always kill their makers.

But really this was ridiculous! I hated to admit it, but for all my skill my formula was only a mixture of soaps and medicines and ointments. Nothing could grow out of that, could it? At least nothing alive.

But had those different substances ever been mixed in just those amounts before? I knew proportions meant a lot. I could have just happened to hit on the right combination. A word came back to me I had heard on T. V. : "the primordial soup." THAT didn't sound good.

But if I poured it out, what would I have to play with tomorrow? My secret formula would be gone. And all for a stupid dream and dumb fears.

But the feeling of the dream was still with me. What if I found everyone eaten up in the morning because I was afraid to get rid of my concoction?

I threw back the covers and headed for the bedroom door, but I slowed down before reaching it. I peaked out cautiously but everything was dark and nothing moved. I opened the door and moved into the hall, careful to step over the creaky spots. The first thing I noticed was a slight but disgusting odor. I almost went back but I had smelled things before. The kitchen was just down the stairs. I crept up to the bathroom door and almost slipped, having to catch the door handle and jiggling it a bit.

I froze very still in the quiet of the sleeping house and strained to hear the stirring of someone rising. Nothing.

I opened the bathroom door. I stepped in hurriedly and dumped the bucket. I rushed on tiptoes back across the hall and deep under the covers of my bed. My heart was beating fast with so much excitement that I probably only imagined there had been less stuff in the bucket than I had remembered.

My conscience calm and clear, I drifted off to sleep.

Awake again. Only this time it was light. I seemed to recall some dark memories from the night before but the light had banished them.

"Jimmy, you come out here right now," my Aunt Stephanie shouted in a strange high-pitched tone. I realized I had not wakened by myself. I rushed into the hall and stopped.

Three different things I sensed one after the other. First, I saw that my chemical tank had been dumped out. (So that hadn't been a dream!) Second, I smelled a taint of familiar odor in the air. Third, I heard Aunt

Stephanie say: "I warned you about making a mess, young man. Now you are going to stay in all day until you clean it all up." She stepped over the point in question and got a rag from the bathroom and threw it to me. I was so dumbfounded that I almost didn't catch it. I remembered almost slipping in this carpeted hall the night before and now I saw why. "How anyone could make such a mess," Aunt Stephanie said, "but you're going to clean it all up."

In a daze I went to my knees, and with Aunt Stephanie lording over me, I began to scrub at the slimy, evil-smelling green ichor that clung to the carpet. Bewildered and frightened, I lifted my eyes and followed the horrid green trail as it left the hall, went down the stairs, and turned out of sight. I hoped, hoped to God that Aunt Stephanie would leave and not make me follow the trail to its end.

All I could think of was curled Christmas garland that looked like rubber.

plink-a-plunk

Annie Klausung

piano flunkie
 cookie dunking
 neighborhood punking
 piano bench sitting
 baby sitter hitter
 kitty cat swinger
 wrong note singer
 held by the ear
 by his mother dear
 fingers plunking keys
 far from pleasing
 but better than a beating