

MONSTERS AT THE MALL

SAMMY CHO is 8 years old.

At **SPOOKS' ELEMENTARY** he's advanced,
so he's told.

But for **SAM**, such news is no big deal.

For to Sammy, school subjects hold no real appeal.

Today at the mall, he follows **NAI NAI CHO** through the stores.

And when she turns for just a second,
he slips away,
up to the third floor.

Past the food court.

On by the penny fountain.

Dairy King.

Carousel.

We Love Toys!

There beside Candy Mountain.

Here, Sammy pauses,

frozen, window to nose,

before the bright new displays at *MakeUp By Lo.*

New Highlighters.

Tints.

Eyeliners and Blush.

Lip stains.

Shadows.

Foundation.

Oh my...**THAT BRUSH.**

And there amidst it all, **LO** is hard at her craft.

Brush here.

Wand there.

They all look.
 They smile.
 They laugh.

SAM watches through glass,
 bewitched and amazed,
 as the pretty girl's face,
 blot by swipe,
IT IS CHANGED.

Not better. Not worse. But different! Bright! New!
 Sam steps toward the entrance.

"THIS PLACE ISN'T FOR YOU!"

He yields to that voice in the back of his head.

Sometimes it's Dad.

Sometimes Mom.

Big brother Michael.

Nai Nai Cho.

Teacher Willis.

Pastor Bo.

Today it's his best friend Jed.

Sam backs away to the bench across the hall.

Here he will sit.

Dream.

At least he can still see it all.

"Pretzel?" A gruff voice offers.

Sam can smell the hot, sweet treat.

"They accidentally gave me two. I'll share my snack
 if you'll share your seat."

Before Sam there stands in 2 great, shiny boots,

With 2 claw-like gloved hands,
 In a neat security suit,
 Something akin to a beast or a bear.
 Maybe a man...
 Only covered in hair.

"MO."

The guard points to a gleaming name plate.

"Short for Monster."

Sam pales, frozen in place.

"HA! Gotcha Kid! Man, you humans...I mean...you
 kids these days..."

Then he hands Sam the pretzel and begins munching away.

Sam contemplates running as he takes a scared, small bite.

He didn't want to be rude.

So he decides to at least finish his pretzel.

It is a gift, after all.

That should be alright.

"What's your name kid?" Mo asks, mouth brimming full.

"Sam," replied Sam, just barely keeping his cool.

"I work this hall here before Miss Lo's.

I've seen you here before.

Yet you're always nose to window or on this bench,
 Never in the store..."

Sam could feel Mo's eyes slowly turn his way.

He stared straight ahead, suddenly very afraid.

"Boy, I know how I look.
 But there's no need for fear.
 I'm a friend.
 Whatever you say, it'll stay right here."

Sam met Do's strange eyes...

neon green like a cat.
 Or maybe a sphinx or a snake,
 or some fat, demonic rat.
 But there's warmth there too.
 Love.
 Real care.
 And suddenly, despite the hair, Sam sees the kindness under there.

So Sam began, hardly knowing what to say.

But when he opened his mouth, the words found their way.

"I'm good at school.
 I read. I write.
 History. Math. Science.
 I study every night.

I've played soccer since I was 4 years old.
 I golf and play chess.
 I do what I'm told.

And everyone says that I'm on the right path.
 But how do they know?
 And why am I never asked?

No one asks what I like,
 what I think,

what I want...then again..." Sam's eyes drift back to the store.

"Maybe they shouldn't."

"The makeup, those colors, the products and tools, I've imagined it all with my face.

But the people in the pictures...

In the windows...

They're not my **GENDER**.

And they're not my **RACE**."

SAM sets his snack aside.

Suddenly full. Liberated. Scared.

Amazed at himself for saying so much.

Amazed that someone actually cares.

He steels himself to meet **MO'S** eyes,

scared of what he'll find,

but when he does, they're void of judgment.

Full of interest, easy and kind.

"You know," **MO** begins,

"Some will live their whole lives in disguise.

Like actors taking cues.

There are some in this world who have no choice.

But you, Sammy Cho... **YOU. CAN. CHOOSE.**

Mom and Dad,

Your friend Jed,

Brother Mike,

Nai Nai Cho,

Teacher Willis,

Neighbors,

Guidance Counselors,

Pastor Bo,

Their care for you is real.
 But to fully know another person...
 well, that's impossible,
 no matter how much love one feels.

What you **THINK...**

FEEL...

WANT...

you may never be asked.
 It's up to us all to **STOP BEING TOLD**,
 take the reigns,
 And choose our own paths.

Hear your friends' words.

Hear your family's advice.

I SAID HEAR, NOT HEED.

Remember. Only you have to live with your life."

MO sighed a great, stinky heave,

then flashed **SAM** a warm, fanged grin.

Sam almost smiled back this time. Then **MO** started again.

"Your kind have the potential for great goodness.

But more than not, humans get stuck.

With labels, norms and rules,

Tests, stereotypes, timelines...all that muck.

The world is more diverse, even right here,

than most humans will ever know.

It's up to the brave to expand our sights.

It's by the efforts of people like you that individuals, communities, states, countries, the world grows.

WELP, that's my break.

I've gotta get back to work."

MO stood and adjusted his suit.

"Thanks Mr. Mo," SAM said. MO replied with a smirk

"You're different too, aren't you Mr. Mo? You're not... well...not 'my kind.'"

MO looked back over his shoulder.

His neon eyes, they shined.

Then he stalked away,

Sam sat alone again.

And when MO waved an ungloved paw,

Sam responded with a grin.

This time SAM felt no fear. Just sure of what he knew.

So he stood from his bench, looked straight ahead,
finally knowing what to do.

He didn't stop at the windows to eye the bright displays.

He didn't peer from behind the glass and think of what people
would say,

He didn't pause before the entrance, colored, bright and wide.

Out loud he shushed his mind's voices.

SAM went on inside.

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For more spooky bits to come...*