

Under the Bed

I'm not sure what they are or where they came from, but I've been living with them for as long as I can remember. There are nine of them, at least I know that now. When I was little, they were scarier because I had no idea how many of them were around. There are nine. One lives in the basement, one in the attic. There's one living in the shed out back, one in the big cupboard in the kitchen. One likes to hide in the hall closet. One lives underneath the stairs in the living room. There's one that I've never seen, but it talks to me; it lives in the radio in the den. There's another that I see every morning but it *never* talks; it lives in the mirror in my bathroom. Then there's Feltner. He lives under my bed, of all places. I hate him most of all. Even the others hate him.

Like I said, I don't know what they are or why they like my house so much; or maybe it's me they like. All I know about them is that they're ugly and they love torturing me. They've hurt people I love and people I don't. They've even hurt me, but as I said before they seem to like me enough to keep me around. I'm fifty five years old and I haven't slept a night in my life without them around. They like to taunt me and yell at me; tell me things I don't want to hear. They only show themselves at night; that used to scare me a lot when I was a kid. Now, I'm used to it. They're not nice to look at and I'm not even sure what most of them *really* look like. They change themselves around sometimes to surprise me. Not much surprises me now.

I really don't know how I was able to grow up in this house and have even a modestly good life. I was never able to have friends over, out of fear that they might try to hurt them. Every night I had to listen to them. Sometimes they would all gather in my room at once. I would keep my head under the pillow on those nights. They were bad enough to look at one at a time.

I tell you, they picked some real choice spots to live in. The closet, under the stairs, the basement, under the bed. It sounds pretty cliché, huh? Well, I'm sure they were there before everybody started making jokes about them being there.

They love teasing me. One day I tried to find out where they came from, so I went up and down the house asking each one where they were from, and made a record to see if any of them said the same thing. Hopskard told me that they had come from outer space to conquer our planet. Grendrik said that they had been sent from another dimension to tell their people what it was like living in an attic. Daggs tried to convince me that they were special agents sent by the government to investigate my parents, who were communist spies. Brackle said that my house was bad and that he and the others were trying to fix it. But he warned me that if we didn't have enough money to pay them, they would put a spell on the house so it would eat us all.

Ebry never talked to me, but she loved telling stories nonetheless. She showed me pictures of this long tale about an evil wizard and a princess, and a great war, and a little boy who got his head taken off for asking too many questions. I told her it was a little hard to swallow and she just laughed at me. I tried to talk to Argle, but he was always a little eccentric. All he could tell me was that dogs were the enemy. Then he made barking

sounds and I shut the door on him again. Wisper said that God sent them here to bother me because he didn't love me anymore. Hisplis used the same story, except he said that it was my mother who didn't love me, so she called for them. I didn't believe any of them. They were all just trying to get a rouse out of me, or scare me, or make fun of me.

Then I asked Feltner. He said that they all came from Hell to frighten me and make me miserable. Him I believed. There was one thing I liked about Feltner. He didn't lie like the rest of them. He always told the truth. That's also why I hated him so much. The truth was always scarier. He would tell me that they were going to kill my parents and my friends and everybody I knew. They all said that. They all made threats at me and then laughed, or pushed me down or something. It got to be annoying after a while. But Feltner... he used to tell me about all the people he would hurt, and how he would do it. And then he would assure me that they would never kill *me*, because they wanted to keep playing. I believed him and I feared that I would be stuck playing this game forever.

They always wanted me to bring my friends over to play hide and seek with them. I don't know why I agreed but there were nine of them and only one of me, so I wasn't in a position to refuse. They may not have been willing to kill me but they loved torturing me. My friends visited and, reluctantly, I let them play at the house. Hide and seek. I never got a chance to hide, because the game would end so quickly. They hid, I sought and I never found them. Then I told my mom that they all went home, and that was it. I didn't invite anybody to my house after that.