

The Monster under the Bed

By: Mary E. Weems, Ph.D.

Characters:

Crystal: Black woman, professional, well groomed, early 60s

Jack: Black man, Famous, walks using a cane, early 70s

Setting:

Black Box or stark stage. Two chairs. Pillow on floor downstage in front of first chair represent the bed which should be the length of the space from the outer edge of the first chair to the outer edge of the other.

Crystal enters stage walking tall and proud. Suddenly she shifts briefly to a cocky defiant walk, the walk of a much younger woman, then back to proud. The two different walks will help audience know when she's being herself or her 'unknown' to her, alter-ego Moniqua. Crystal's wearing I Spy sunglasses, a long sleeved top, long skirt and classy low heeled pumps. She takes a seat in one chair, gets up, takes a chair in the next, begins:

Crystal: I thought I was meeting a God. I'd just graduated from high school and thanks to constant prayer, a 4.0 GPA and what I thought was luck, had been awarded an internship on a TV show. *(Beat)* I was so happy. When Ms. Johnson, my old counselor called me at home I thought she had the wrong number. I started blabbing about this girl Kahla who'd managed a 4.2 GPA and wanted this internship just as bad as I did. Then—

She stops, changes to alter-ego Moniqua

Moniqua: Crystal kill me with that shit. Always considering the other person, downplaying whatever she does well, always thinkin' she don't deserve what she deserve. Fuck that shit. *(Light out)*

Jack enters walking tall and proud on a cane carrying a large, Cuban cigar. He stands in front of chair, raises cigar in a Grouch Marx gesture, begins:

Jack: I've dedicated my entire life to helping people. Black people in particular. Was raised to understand the importance of giving—so I did. Even as a little boy I'd volunteer my time to help elder women in the neighborhood without husbands. Running errands, cutting grass, sometimes sitting for long lunches just to listen to them talk. *(He sits on edge of chair)* My father used to say if you accomplish a lot, if you're blessed to what he called 'make it' you have to help others get wherever they want to go to life. And if they haven't figured that out, your job is to guide them. *(Light out).*

Crystal: *(Light up on chair. She gets up lies on floor, head on pillow. Suddenly she screams, kicks legs up, pushes with her arms as if to get someone up off of her. She gets up as Moniqua)*

Moniqua: She still can't get her story straight. Damn near every night she barely sleeps is the same. Starts out with the warm milk her therapist, that bitch Dr. Becky recommends, tight tucked sheets to keep her from feeling like any minute

somebody could get between her legs. I could set my watch by her. At 1 a.m., exactly, adjusted for time zone if she's out of town, she sleep wakes up, tears off the covers, lies back flat as a stone for a few moments then like a just-made action movie (*She starts acting this out*) kick, punch, jump! (*Beat*) Only surprise tonight is the scream. First time she's ever done that.

She walks over, picks up pillow from floor, tucks it under one arm and walks offstage

Lights up on Jack. He's seated comfortably back in the chair counting a bank roll big enough to choke an elephant. He continues for a few moments, stands to put the bills back in both pockets. Unlit Cuban cigar sticks out of the right corner of his mouth.

Jack: I hate rap. To me it's a bunch of too loud disjointed words punctuated by vulgarity. Young men cussing to show us they can. Entire generations going prematurely deaf. One thing some of them got right is when they say "dolla bills ya'll." (*Beat*) With enough money and connections, you can control anything, the only exception being the weather. (*Light out*)

Crystal enters carrying pillow in one hand as if it's contaminated. She drops it on the floor in same area of stage pre-set as bed. Takes a seat and takes off her sunglasses

Crystal: When I was 8 years old, there weren't enough Black people on TV to make up a baseball team. Each week mama and daddy would read Jet Magazine and "The Call and Respond" our local Black newspaper, to see which shows were on and who was being featured so we could watch. (*Beat*) One of their favorites starred him and this ugly white man who had a mouth like a straight line. (*Beat*) (*Crystal holds sunglasses out between thumb and forefinger.*) One morning when I came to the breakfast table, daddy had this big smile on his face and mama turned around from the stove to watch me. These glasses were made just like the ones he wore. My parents collected oatmeal box tops for months to have enough to get them. (*Beat*) For years these were my favorite possession. I used to take them to school to not let my friends try them on. Used to keep them on the nightstand by my bed. (*Beat*) (*She gets up as Moniqua.*)

Moniqua: (*Throws glasses on ground and stomps the shit out of them. Returns to chair. Puts up her middle finger.*) (*Light out.*)

Jack: (*Light up*) Young Black people have no idea what it was like when I became a co-star of that show. A Black man in sunglasses speaking intelligently, investigating white people with a white partner? Unheard of. (*Beat*) Producers were so worried that if not for my co-star Ron putting his butt and career on the line saying "I won't do the show without Jack," they would have put a white actor in my slot fast as they could get rid of me and changed the storyline. (*Beat*) For years after

the show ended, I used to hear from my wife, that friends would ask her privately if I'd tried my best to get other Blacks or Negroes are we were called back then, on that show. *(Beat)* I did. At almost every production meeting we ever had. I'd pre-read the script find a role that could be cast without causing any public backlash by white people. I'd develop my pitch "Excuse me but this role, the man who drives the guest star to the hotel, who rides him through the angry mob, who only has *four* speaking lines, couldn't a Negro be cast here? I mean the show's doing well, ratings are up, and so on. *(Beat)* I'd continue to argue until one of two things happened. Either I'd be told no and let's move on or a rare yes, okay we'll do it. *(Beat)* That's right, people don't know, but that's what happened. *(Light out)*

Moniqua: I tried to tell her, my voice louder than her heartbeat, louder than anything out in the world but she still in denial. Still pretending she doesn't hear me. Refusing to tell anyone I exist. *(Beat)* Shit, that mothafucka's got somebody talkin' to him too. Encouraging him to do the right thing, millions to Black colleges, helpin' young actors get started, makin' people forget they troubles, makin' them laugh. *(She takes a child's toy out of her pocket)* Little kids could always see the monster lurking like the scary thing under a bed, right underneath his smile. *(Beat)* Crystal never told anyone about what happened to her, even when everything blew up in his face like a bomb. While she watched news report after news report I'd be screaming as loud as I could. *(Beat)* Just heard a reporter say something he said in his deposition about *avoiding* having sex because he didn't want women to fall in love with him. What?! *(Light Out)*

Light up. Crystal is standing in front of chair as if in a trance. Begins slowly unbuttoning her shirt to reveal a black t-shirt with "We're the S!" written in large white letters. She drapes the shirt across the chair. Sits down.

Crystal: My internship was on "We the S!" *(Beat)* As someone who didn't grow up the way most shows about Black folks portrayed us back then poor, uneducated, and struggling. Either selling junk or living in the projects, constantly worried about a job. *(Beat)* Both my parents worked hard at the Post Office. My father was a mail carrier, my mother a postal clerk who sorted the mail he delivered. When what people in my neighborhood quickly shortened to "The S!" first came on with the handsome, educated father and mother, kids who talked in a way that still gets Black kids beat up—I fell in love with each and every character especially *his* role.

She walks around the chair changing into Monique as she walks. Moniqua strips off the t-shirt, balls it up between and sits legs open, holding it like a dirty diaper.

Moniqua: What happened to Crystal was hard to watch. Hated it. Wanted to help—couldn't. Her first day on the set was like walking into a tightly controlled unit, rules established and enforced by him. *(She throws t-shirt downstage and off of the end of it) (stands at attention downstage center.)* Rule #1 This is my show and what I say goes Rule #2 What happens on and off this set stays in our TV family—no talking to the media unless I have personally told you it's okay. Rule #3 No cussing, no drug use, no love relationships with other members of this production. This includes everybody. No exceptions. Any questions? See Rule #1. *(Beat)* You coulda heard a baby rat pissin' on cotton. Crystal stood just out of sight of the cast watching him as he spoke, taking notes. He turned to look at her for several seconds before he said a word. Then he shouted "What are you looking at? Get over here and make yourself useful. Family this is my new intern what's-her-name. Just kidding, her name is Crystal. She'll be with "What the S!" for one year. If you need anything from her don't. Her job is to do whatever I ask her to do. Questions? Good. Let's get to work people. *(Beat)* She was happy, scared, confused, eager to please. *(Light Out)*.

Jack sits legs together holding cigar between his hands like an erection

Jack: It took me a long time to train Crystal. *(Beat)* I started by sending her fresh flowers her second day on the set with a card that read "Welcome to my world, Mr. J." She was so excited when I saw her on the set that morning she wore one of the flowers in her hair. I pretended I didn't notice, but made sure she got them every day for a month. *(Beat)* I set a dress code for her too. No pants, no t-shirts, only skirts, and white starched long-sleeved shirts, or short sleeved or sleeveless tops designed for an office and—bare legs. She had a standing weekly appointment at the local day spa, facial, manicure, pedicure—on me. *(Beat)* I knew I had her when I overheard her tell her dad on the phone "Daddy, he treats me like a daughter." *(Light out)*.

Crystal walks out with pillow held in arms like it's a baby. Walks to edge of stage, sits down.

Crystal: Nothing that had ever happened to me prepared me for Mr. J. He was so good to me. Always patient, always teaching me about the business end of show business, flowers, spa time, long lunches, long walks at the end of the day when I knew he was tired and ready for a break. *(Beat)* Didn't take long before I trusted him completely—respected him to the utmost, kept him in my prayers, loved him like a second dad. *(Suddenly as Moniqua she takes the pillow by one end and snaps it sharply as if about to put it on an unmade bed)*

Moniqua: My grandmother used to say you can catch more flies with sugar than you can with vinegar *(Beat)* brown sugar. Well that mothafucka coulda own a sugar

plantation. Everybody on the show tippy toeing on their P's and Q's following the rules pretending to be unaware of the too-much attention he was paying to a young intern, pretending everything was perfect on "What the S!" (*Beat*)

She gets up puts pillow back in its place on the floor. Changes to Crystal. Her cell phone rings. Jack's part should be said by the actor just off stage so the audience can hear.

Crystal: Hello? Hello? (*Beat*) Who is this?

Jack: (*Spells*) M-E-L-L-O

Crystal: (*Silence*)

Jack: Hello?

Crystal: Yes.

Jack: What's wrong?

Crystal: Nothing. I was going to ask you the same— (*Changes to Moniqua*)

Moniqua: What she should have said was "Who is this, why you spellin' mello and what you doin' callin' me at 3 o'clock in the fuckin' mornin'. Plus, where's your wife?" (*She changes back to Crystal. Crystal's phone rings*)

Crystal: Hello daddy? Yep, you're right I know I was supposed to call you yesterday. Huh? Yep, I did. I thought we'd finish on time for a change but he asked me to stay behind at the last minute to help with tomorrow's shooting details. Yes, daddy, I know, I'm listening. You're (*Beat*) No, funny you mention it but I've never met his wife. (*Beat*) Nope, I've never met his wife. I've heard her voice, I know what she looks like, I'd even recognize her handwriting, but she hasn't been here once. (*Beat*) Okay, okay daddy I'll be careful. Talk to you next Sunday. (*Beat*) Love you. (*Light out*)

Jack: (*Standing downstage center as if he's delivering a comedy routine*) I learned a lot about what it means to be a man from my grandfather. (*Beat*) Well, he wasn't actually my grandfather by blood. He was the man in my neighborhood who'd take the time to talk to us young bloods who had sense enough to listen when he was willing to what he called "waste some time with the uninformed." (*Beat*) Man did he love to read, always had two or three books going at the same time. DuBois, Phyllis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, Woodson, Richard Wright, Malcolm, Zora. He used to teach us the message in each one mixed up with the details of his long life in the streets. I never heard anyone in my family even mention. When it came to male-female relationships, his motto comes right out of a James Brown song even though Mr. D. used to swear he said it first "This is a Man's world,"

except he completely disagreed with the second half of that line, ‘but it wouldn’t be nothin’, nothin’ without a woman or a girl.’ *(Beat)* I grew up spending more time with him than any other man except my father who I knew didn’t like Mr. D., but didn’t know why. *(Beat)* One night before curfew, I stopped by Mr. D’s house. I needed to talk to him about something. To my surprise he’d been drinking and was still in his pajamas. I was damn near grown so I didn’t care about the drinking part and when I tried to apologize and leave he insisted I come in. *(Beat)* He was watching some old silent film I couldn’t see clearly at first on the small screen of that old TV he wouldn’t get rid of. As I got close enough to sit down I saw a naked white man in a cemetery beside a grave, having sex with a--- dead body. In my mind I wanted to run, say something to Mr. D. about how freaked out and disgusting that was, ask him why he let me in, why he was watching some mess like that then I noticed, I hadn’t moved a muscle, had stopped breathing—*(Light Out)*

Light up. Crystal sits in chair leaning over to “see” what she describes on bed

Crystal: *(Sings)* “Back when I was a child, before life removed all the innocence. *(Beat)* I’d been his intern for nine months, same amount of time it takes a woman to give birth. By this time, he was already talking to me about becoming his paid personal assistant. *(Beat)* We’d just finished another episode and everybody had been given a week off including me. He’d asked me to bring the next script to his hotel room. When I knocked, he opened the door wearing silk pajamas and a robe. He reached out, took the script with one hand, gently caressed the back of my neck. It felt weird but when he said I looked tired and like I could use a massage I relaxed. *(Beat)* He had dinner waiting on the dining room table including my favorite, chocolate milk. For some reason I wasn’t thirsty and when I kept eating and talking to him about my day as usual, he said “Drink your milk.” So I did. *(She gets up, walks over to edge of ‘bed’)* I woke up with semen in my mouth, on my lips, drying on the insides of my thighs, soft jazz, Miles I think, was playing in the background, why do I remember that? And I was afraid to move.

She lies down with head ‘off’ the pillow. Sits up slowly, looks between her legs

When I did, I knew. Lying between my legs like a man’s penis was this fresh just clipped Cuban cigar. *(She slaps herself in the face, gets up as Moniqua)*

Moniqua: I saw everything and couldn’t do shit to stop it. There was enough Quaalude in that milk to damn near stopped her heart. He sat there innocent as hell and watched while she passed out in her chair. *(Beat)* Bastard got up, stripped naked, started to jack off over the table. When he was ready he picked her up like a rag doll, positioned her knocked out head on the pillow, mouth raped her, came,

jacked off again, raped her, raped her, raped her and raped her some more, her body moving up and down from the force like an unconscious rag doll, arms and legs hitting the floor while he raped her silent as a lamb. *(Beat)* When he was done he laughed “Heh, Heh, Heh.” *(Beat)* Afterwards, he sat between her legs limp dick in his hands, got up, got a fresh Cuban from the box on his nightstand, clipped it for smoking, left it between her legs. *(Beat)* Called his driver to take him to the airport, so he could fly home to his wife. *(Light Out)*

Jack takes a pair of lace panties out of his sock, loops his hands through the leg holes

I’m not sure why all these women are accusing me. I’ve been nothing but good to each of them. Now they’re pretending they were violated in some way. The part played in “We’re the S!” was easy to do because it was me being me. *(Stands up)* I didn’t do anything each of those women wouldn’t have agreed to if I’d asked their permission. Hell, back then taking Quaaludes was like having a drink. The pills were only to help them relax so I had a chance every now and then to be on the receiving end in a way that didn’t require me to do anything to please anyone but me. *(Beat)* Heh, Heh, Heh. *(Light out)*

(Beat) Suddenly audience hears Moniqua speaking in the dark

Moniqua: What you say you serial raping mothafucka! *(Lights up. Moniqua has a gun pointed at Jack’s genitals and she is almost nose-close to his face).*

Jack: Wait a—

Moniqua: *(Quietly)* Not one word Jack. Not even one. You finally killed somebody. Soon as she heard that sound, that so-called laugh you liked to make every time you raped a woman, Crystal went somewhere else, some place you don’t come back from, some place she don’t have to even think about *you* no more. *(Beat)* She left me here to do the one thing that would have stopped you a long time ago. *(Lights Out)*

Bang! *(Beat) (Lights Up)*

(Crystal is standing on Jack’s left side with her right arm straight up in the air as if she was starting a race. She notices Cosby. Looks confused. Beat. She moves slowly toward him, cautiously checks his pulse, realizes he’s alive but knocked out for some reason she doesn’t know. She holds the gun to his head, reaches up with her left hand to rub her hand across her forehead. She’s trying to figure out where she is and what’s going on.)

Crystal: Used to have this dream all the time. First ten years or so after I got away from him, after my internship and the six months I spent as his personal assistant—my

mother and father thought it would be rude and ungrateful to turn him down, were over. Several times a month, I'd finally get to sleep and run into him sudden-like as if one minute the whole world was quiet, then something wrong appeared out of the air, took human form and scared the shit out of me. *(Beat)* Some time I'd have a gun, some time a knife, some time a box cutter. *(Beat)* Nothing ever happened, I'd see him, feel the weapon in my hand, then before he could say a word dream would end and *(Beat)* I'd wake up several days later. *(Takes gun from Jack's head, picks up second chair, moves almost to edge of stage at an angle that allows her to keep an eye on Jack and takes a seat)*. Each time it happened like a dark hole in memory, brief glimpses of somebody who looks like but doesn't feel like me. Me drunk, me cussing, me sitting in an alley wearing one shoe and no panties. Now this, except *(She looks over at Jack still knocked in the chair, using her gun arm as a pointer.)* Except this is not a dream right? She pinches herself *(Looks back at Jack again)* Can't be. *(Looks around)* For one thing I'm still wherever this is, I never touched Jack in any of my dreams and I definitely know what a real pulse feels like. No, I'm not dreaming and for the first time since forever, I'm not afraid. *(Beat)* Fact I feel *(Beat)* Okay *(She gets up slowly begins to move like someone who is being changed, healed in the moment. She looks up)* Hear that God? I feel okay, almost like I felt when I'd just turned 18, before I met *(Looks at Jack)* THAT. Like the whole world was possible and everything I'd ever dreamed about as a child could—*(Beat)* I've been listening to the news the last few days. Report after report. Women as old as 80, women all across the country, from all walks of life, all telling the same story. How Jack was real nice at first, made promises they believed he would keep. How he drugged them, raped them, took their power to protect, feel safe, not be afraid. *(Beat)* *(She stands, gun dangles at her right side, her hand remains on trigger and an unconscious Jack is never out of eyesight)*. Didn't think I'd ever come back. Don't know why or how, all I know is I feel like dancing, painting my apartment green, buying a new car *(Begins walk/dancing offstage continuing)*, calling my daddy, and *(Looks back at Jack)* never coming back to whatever this is again. *(Exits the stage.)*

Lights out

Playwright's Note

This play is the product of my imagination. It is informed by facts as shared in Bill Cosby's deposition released by the judge who heard the civil suit brought against him by one of his victims ten years prior, in July of 2015, some of the women who agreed to be interviewed and other sources in the print, on-line and news media. It's shared in the hope that the victims of sexual assault, including assaults perpetrated by serial rapists will not be forgotten. In the hope that more women when violated will speak up so that the epidemic of all forms of violence against women 'globally' will one day be part of the horror side of history.