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## THE MUFFINS OF MRS MOSLEY

by

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Mrs Mosley is one of those monsters that you've got to love. She is the sweetest. Every time I pass by her tea-shop, she offers me a muffin. She calls them the monstrous muffins, ah! No, they are not ugly: they are just monstrously huge. Her shop smells like roses, and she has a knack for interior design. This is why I just cannot believe what happened today.

But hold on for one second, now. Before I tell you her story (which is totally worth your time, so brace yourself!), I'd better present myself.

My name is Joe, and I am a twelve-year-old curly-haired girl. I live in a quiet neighbourhood of a relatively small, very ordinary town called Strangeopoly.

Strangeopoly is comprised of approximately half common humans, half monsters, a few fairies and some Vikings from the North. I have lived here all my life, and what I love to do most is play with the other children down by the lake, help my dad harvest wood for the winter, and write about what happens in our town. My future career as a journalist is a certainty in my life. You understand that I cannot pass up the opportunity to tell you what I witnessed earlier. So now, get a muffin, a cup of tea, sit down and let's start from the beginning.

Strangeopoly's weather is unpredictable. Yesterday started out as a very sunny day. The sky was bright and blue, and you could not spot the smallest cloud. It was a perfect day for catching butterflies. When I woke up, mum had already gone out for work, so I dressed quickly and ran downstairs. My butterfly net was waiting for me next to the door, as were my shiny red shoes. Jasper, the cat, was lounged on the sofa's arm: two legs on one side, two on the other, his tail

hanging down from his body and rhythmically trembling. I knew that as soon as I opened the door, he would stand up and accompany me on my journey.

I gathered my things, including my backpack, a couple of tissues, mosquito spray and a fairy deterrent. I was ready. I unlocked the door, and Jasper stood up, stretched, purred, rubbed his nose on my calf, and we were ready to go. I inserted the keys in the lock, locked the door behind me, and headed towards the pond.

The pond is not far from my house, but the easiest way to get there is to pass through town and then take a left turn into the woods.

The streets of Strangeopolis are almost all narrow, except for the Milky Way, which is also the main road. The Milky Way is very busy as all the merchants from outer space come to sell their goods to the local shop owners. Milk is very sought after, and the one from the cows of the pastures of the third moon is Mrs Mosley's favourite: 'without it, my muffins are no muffins at all,' she tells the delivery guy every day.

Halfway through the Milky Way, my belly started to rumble, and so did the sky. The weather was changing, and Jasper looked at me, his shiny whiskers trembling:

'Of course, Juspy! We did not have breakfast, and we'd better find a shelter because a storm is coming,' I said.

As I lifted my eyes, boy was I glad to discover that we were just in front of Mrs Mosley's café.

Quickly, we stepped through the wooden gate that surrounded the shop and walked towards the entrance. Mrs Mosley loved to keep her grounds clean and flowery. The lawn was neatly

mown, the bushes trimmed as lollipops and candies, and you could smell roses, cinnamon, apple, and caramel in the air. As we approached the door jumping from one stone to the next on the path (isn't this one of your favourite games, too?), we realized that the door was closed. In all the years we came to visit the café, this was a first.

Carefully, I raised my fist and knocked. No answer. I looked at Jasper, who meowed back at me and decided to take a few steps back and sit next to a pot of roses. I knocked again. Still no answer.

There was a small tilted half-moon-shaped window on the door and two patio chairs at arm's length. I reached for one, climbed on it and peeked through. Candles were lit inside, and a sense of stillness enveloped the room. There were muffins on the shop counter and cakes and lollipops, but no sign of Mrs Mosley.

While I was staring at the cakes with my stomach growling now incessantly, something broke the motionless picture and caught my attention. The candles' flames were now bent towards us, under the effect of an invisible air stream that seemed to be coming for the cellar door that had been left opened inside.

Intrigued, I stepped down from the chair.

'Jasper, you wait here,' I said while I turned the doorknob.

'Mrs Mosley?' I said quietly. 'Mrs Mosley, It's Joe.'

There seemed to be nobody home, but I could feel the stream of air on my face now. One step after another, I approached the cellar door and took a peep. A snail stair wound its way

towards the lower floor. I could not see the end of it, but there was a faint light coming from there.

I carefully descended. Halfway down, I heard someone enter the shop. As they slam the door behind them, I rushed towards the last step and hid behind some shelves. Applesauce jars were piled so tightly on the racks that you could not see past them if you did not stand very close.

‘Oh boy,’ I thought, slamming my right hand against my forehead.

The cellar was lit by a few candles. The room was much bigger than I had imagined. There were shelves around the walls, some boxes piled up on the other side, and a very peculiar construction at the centre of the room. It looked like a stone-well, and there was even a wooden bucket secured on top of the structure. A stream of warm air was coming up from there.

I could hear voices upstairs, and they were becoming increasingly clear. Whoever these people were, they would soon be joining me.

‘I hope this will help them’, said Mrs Mosley. ‘I cannot stand to see them like this.’

‘I think this should do,’ said one of the voices, ‘it’s prime quality.’

‘It will have to. We need them to cook another couple of batches,’ replied the other, with a thick Viking accent.

A few instants passed and Mrs Mosley, a Viking and a tiny monster entered the cellar.

The Viking was so tall that he had to keep his head tilted so as not to hit the ceiling. And his armour was metallic and looked cold under a heavy coat of fur. Mrs Mosley was the same old monster: her curves were soft; her skin pale purple, and she wore her cooking gown with pride.

Between them, the little monster. He was so tiny that he could have fit in one of the Viking's pockets.

They were carrying a package with them. It was small and wrapped in brown paper. Mrs Mosley lit some more candles and approached the well. She looked inside and yelled:

'We got some more for you. I am sending the bucket down.'

Suddenly, a buzzing sound that got louder by the second came from the very depths of the well. The Viking untied the bucket and slowly dropped it with a rope.

A few moments later, the rope started to shake. Someone had signalled for the Viking to pull up. As the bucket approached the cellar, a green light intensified from the depths. Where was that light coming from?

I gasped and brought my hands to my mouth as if to tell myself to keep it shut. It was a fairy! But she did not look well. Happy and healthy fairies emanate a pink or purple light. Her aura was greenish and faint.

'Here is some more. This should help.' Said Mrs Mosely, while the little monster opened the package, and an intense smell of lavender pervaded the room.

'Bzz, buzz, bzz,' said the fairy.

'I know, I know. We already tried lavender and it did not solve the problem, but it helped you a bit, did it not?' said Mrs Mosley.

'BZZZZZZZZ, bzazz, bzut!' replied the fairy. She then crossed her arms and turned her head away.

‘It will have to do. I am sorry, I really am. But you have to get back to work now. We need those muffins!’ Mrs Mosley’s voice was shaky and full of doubt. She looked at the Viking.

‘We sure do. I have an army to feed.’ Replied Gunnar Hamundarson, pacing back and forth as he spoke, his musky smell permeating the room. He then growled, cleared his throat and spat on the floor.

Mrs Mosley turned her gaze away from Gunnar and directly at the applesauce shelf. Suddenly, she stopped, her eyes squinted, and her lips opened slightly. But she did not say a word.

‘Bring her back down,’ said Gunnar to the little monster, who gave the lavender to the fairy and sent the bucket back where it came from.

‘We are done here. I expect our order to be on its way by later tonight.’ Said Gunnar, and he signalled to the little monster to follow him upstairs.

Mrs Mosley, whose red cheeks were much paler than they usually are, stood her ground and patiently waited for the two guests to leave. As soon as she heard the entrance door slamming closed, she turned towards me.

‘Joe, come out from there, will you?’ she said.

My heart skipped a beat. She had known all along that someone was hiding there, and more importantly, she knew it was me.

I stood up, my legs shaking. Whether they were shaking because of the position in which I had ducked during the whole time, or for fear that Mrs Mosley would throw me down with the fairies, I do not know. I scanned the room once again and calculated the distance between the

stairs and where I was standing. Mrs Mosley was not the most athletic of the monsters: I had enough head-start should I have needed to run.

‘What... What are those fairies doing down there? Are they ok?’ I asked, my voice as steady as I could keep it.

‘Oh Joe,’ said Mrs Mosley, and violet tears started falling from her round eyes.

‘You see,’ she continued, ‘it’s about my muffins. You know how everyone likes them, right? Well, it’s all a lie!’

‘It’s all a lie? What do you mean?’ I asked.

Mrs Mosley was sobbing loudly now. I put a hand in my left pocket, took out a handkerchief, and offered it to her. She took it, blew her nose, and patted her eyes. She continued:

‘It’s not me, you see? It never was. I am an excellent baker, but I bake tiny treats for fairies and gnomes. I am completely unable to bake human (or monster)-sized pastry! I know, I know, it sounds ridiculous, but it’s the way it is. Come, I’ll show you.’

I followed her up the stairs, throwing an eye on the well one last time: it was silent now, and there was no green light coming from it. Mrs Mosley brought me to what I thought would be her kitchen. I had eaten so many times in her shop, but I had never stepped on the other side of the counter.

The kitchen was separated from the main room by a heavy pink velvet curtain. Once I went through the curtain, I was at a loss for words. There was no kitchen there! Or better, yes, there was, but it was so, well, tiny! There is no other adjective to describe it. Everything was small.

The muffin and cupcake trays were doll-sized, and so were the whisks, the blades, the oven and the toaster. It was like we had entered a very well-equipped doll's house. I looked at Mrs Mosley, and she nodded.

‘Yes, I cook here.’

It was almost impossible to believe, but instead of trying to convince me, she started weighing out the butter and the flour. And then she was baking. And her huge hands were working that little dough with mastery from another world. If I did not know any better, I would have thought it was magic. In a few minutes, four dozen muffins filled the mini-trays.

While we waited for the oven to do its magic, we sat at a round table in front of a cup of tea. Mrs Mosley said:

‘You see Joe, those fairies down there. It's them who cook the muffins that you like so much. It's them who do the magic.’

My eyes got bigger, and I almost spit the tea that I had just sipped.

‘You see, this has never been a problem until now because there was a fair exchange. The fairies would cook the muffins for my clients, and I would cook treats for them. We had this arrangement for as long as I can remember, and everyone was happy. But then they came.’ And she stopped to blow her nose once more.

‘Who came?’ I asked.

‘Gunnar and his gang. They are planning something, you see? Him and his army. They want to come and... Oh, my dear fairy Queen!! What did I do?!’

And she brought her hands to her eyes and sobbed inconsolably for a few minutes.

I stood up and put one of my hands on her shoulder. With the other, I gently moved her fingers away from her eyes. I squatted down next to her, took her hands in mine and said:

‘Let me help you.’

‘No, Joe, you don’t understand. They want to invade Strangeopoly. They will do so because of me. My dear fairies have cooked so many special muffins for Gunnar and his army that they are now strong, invincible. At first, I thought they just liked the muffins’ taste, so I agreed to send some trucks. They paid me well, and I could use the money, and I just did not think any further. But it turns out that my muffins, well, my fairies’ muffins, make them very strong. And so now they are planning to take over the town, and they would be already here if it weren’t for...’ she stopped.

‘If it weren’t for what?’ I asked.

‘The fairies started to get sick. They slowed down production. It’s been a couple of weeks now, but they are not doing well. We tried everything, but they don’t seem to get better. They even refuse to eat my treats. We tried with lavender, which normally works so well with fairies, but no. They are so poorly, Joe. And I do not know what I am supposed to do.’

I stood up and paused for a moment. Then I said:

‘Mrs Mosley, I think the only thing that the fairies need is freedom. You see, they are like the butterflies I was going to catch today. I had a net, and all and I would have caught some, but just to look at them up-close. Then, as I always do, I would have released them. As for the butterflies, the fairies are happy and well only when they are free. Here is what we are going to do.’ And I smiled.

‘Just accompany me back to the well. When is Gunnar supposed to come back?’

‘Later tonight.’ Mrs Mosley said.

We went downstairs, and we used the bucket to bring up a couple of fairies. I told Mrs Mosely to translate for me, as I addressed the fairies:

‘Can you bake a special kind of muffins for Gunnar and his gang? We need them for this evening. You just need to add this ingredient into the mix.’ And I passed her the bottle of fairy repellent.

She looked at me with scared eyes, but I said:

‘It’s not for you. You just put it in the muffins before baking them, ok?’

Mrs Mosley looked at me and gasped:

‘Are you sure this is a good idea?’

‘I am positive. It’s not going to harm them much. After all, it’s just castor oil. They might suddenly need to stop by the bathroom, that’s all.’

We all smiled.

The fairies baked for the rest of the day. They baked their famous muffins, but with a ‘twist’. Mrs Mosley explained to me that the fairies used to be able to fly in and out of the well as it pleased them but that the Vikings had closed them there for so long that their wings had lost their fairy powder. For this reason, they could not fly any longer.

Towards evening, the muffins were packed to go. The fairies were sleeping, and Mrs Mosley was ready to welcome Gunnar Hamundarson. Hidden behind the kitchen’s curtains, I listened:

‘And here are your muffins.’ Said Mrs Mosley to Gunnar when he arrived. The little monster was tagging along, as if he were his shadow.

‘At last.’ He replied. ‘I will be back for the last batch in a week, and then we will be ready to move to town permanently.’ And he laughed loudly from his stomach, a smell of rotten eggs coming directly from his bowels.

‘Eww.’ I thought.

When Gunnar and the monster finally left, I re-joined Mrs Mosley in the café’s sitting area. We looked at each other and nodded. It was time for me to go back home. Jasper had patiently waited for me outside. Do not feel too bad for him: his patience was rewarded with a muffin. When he saw me, he rubbed his nose onto my calf and trotted towards home. I followed, and we walked under the moonlight.

And this is how my day went. In case you are wondering: the fairies are still a bit greenish, but the thought of being liberated did them good. It is well known that they have a good sense of humour, so they were cracking up thinking of the Vikings and their poor bellies. Oh, and do not worry about their wings. The light of the sun will regenerate the fairy powder. Soon they will flap their wings and sail through the skies. Watch out for them: they are very annoying if they get tangled in your hair.

I don’t believe that we will hear from Gunnar and his little helper, nor their powerful army for quite a long time. They thought that Strangeopoly was up for grabs, but they could not be any wronger.

Mrs Mosley will have a lot of convincing to do to renew her arrangement with the fairies. But I think I can give her a hand with this. After all, Strangeopoly cannot do without Mrs Mosley's muffins. Maybe they should be called 'the fairies' muffins' from now on!

It's getting very late now, and Jasper and I will have to say goodnight. Thanks for listening to my story, and remember, exciting things happen at Strangeopoly all the time. If you want to hear stories of fairies, Vikings and monsters, my door is always open, and my pen is ready to scribble for you. Goodnight and sweet dreams!