



TWO PAIRS OF EYES

Crockett Johnson

I wish I had a drink of water," said Ellen in the middle of the night.

"Well, get one," said the lion, from the other end of the pillow.

"I'm afraid," Ellen said.

"Of what?" said the lion.

"Of things," said Ellen.

"What kind of things?" said the lion.

"Frightening things," Ellen said. "Things I can't see in the dark. They always follow along behind me."

"How do you know?" said the lion. "If you can't see them—"

"I can't see them because they're always behind me," said Ellen.

"When I turn around they jump behind my back."

"Do you hear them?" asked the lion.

"They never make a sound," Ellen said, shivering. "That's the worst part of it."

The lion thought for a moment.

"Hmm," he said.

"They're awful," Ellen continued.

“Ellen,” the lion said, “I don’t think there are any such things.”

“Oh, no? Then how can they scare me?” said Ellen indignantly.

“They’re terribly scary things.”

“They must be exceedingly scary,” said the lion. “If they keep hiding in back of you, they can’t be very brave.”

Ellen frowned at the lion. Then she considered what he had said.

“I guess they’re not very brave,” she agreed. “They wouldn’t dare bother me if I could look both ways at the same time.”

“Yes,” said the lion. “But who has two pairs of eyes?”

“Two people have,” Ellen said, staring up at where the ceiling was when it wasn’t so dark. “I wouldn’t be afraid to go down the hall for a drink of water if I was two people.”

Suddenly she reached out for the lion, dragged him to her, and looked him in the eyes.

“Mine are buttons,” he said. “They’re sewn on. I can’t see very well in the dark.”

“Nobody can,” Ellen whispered, as she got out of bed. “But the things don’t know that.”

“How do you know they don’t know?” said the lion.

“I know all about them,” said Ellen. “After all, I made them up in my head didn’t I?”

“Ah,” said the lion. “I said there were no such things.”

“But of course there are,” Ellen said. “I just told you I made them up myself.”

“Yes,” the lion said. “But—”

“So I should know, shouldn’t I?” said Ellen, putting the lion up on her shoulder so that he faced behind her. “Stop arguing with me and keep your eyes open.”

“They’re buttons,” said the lion, bouncing on Ellen’s shoulder as she walked across the bedroom. “My eyes never close.”

“Good,” said Ellen, and she opened the door to the hall.

With a firm grip on the lion’s tail to hold him in place, she marched down the hall to the bathroom, drank a glass of water, and marched back to bed. She looked straight ahead all the way while the lion stared into the darkness behind her, and during the entire trip not a single thing dared bother either of them.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Why is Ellen finally able to get a drink of water?

- Why does Ellen agree with the lion that the scary things must not be very brave?
- Why does Ellen decide to take the lion with her even though he can’t see well in the dark?
- Why does the lion keep arguing that the scary things are not real?
- Why does Ellen tell the lion, “Stop arguing with me and keep your eyes open”? (3)