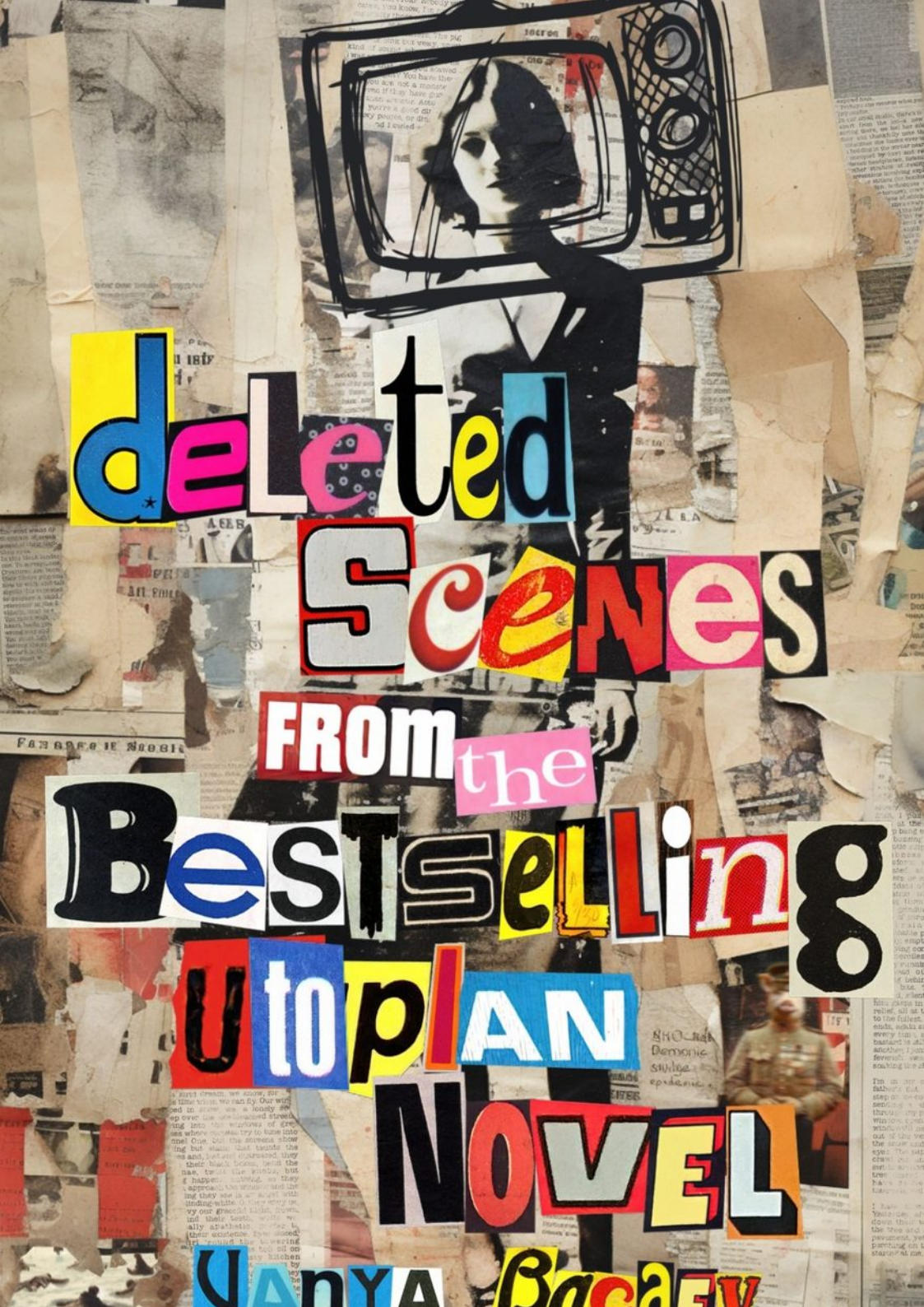

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Scenes
FROM the
Bestselling
Utopian
NOVEL
YANYA BAGLEY

№2: Monsters

nova-nevedoma.com/monsters/

A lurid dream there was of a cold and lightless room where, inside a square fortress built under the large oak table, a lonely warrior held the last outpost against the Darkness wreaking havoc upon the world. The only door in the room was locked shut. Sheets were nailed over the windows. Across the floor, in search of prey, snaked draught, often sneaking into the fortress, making the warrior shiver. Outside, far away, something was rumbling, something not at all like a thunderstorm.

—I'm so glad I found you, Dino. I was so scawed here alone, but together we can be brave, can't we? It's easier to be brave when you're not alone, 'specially in a fowtress like this one. Papa built it for me before he left to fight monsters and Mama said its walls were magical and they would pwotect us, but only if you and I sit here quiet. Wight. So, please, don't roar. Nobody will find us, and nobody will touch us—no monsters or evil people—because, you know, I'm scawed of monsters. They are vewy scawy, like in those horror stowies, especially those soldiers with pig faces and hooves and horns like goats have. They are vewy, vewy scawy. Super-duper scawy! I like animals, and I like piggies, but I don't like when they become monsters. The pig people have sharp tusks and make vewy scawy sounds similar to oink-oink but

vewy, vewy loud and vewy, vewy harsh. Grrrr! Papa used to make this kind of sound when we were playing, but it was not scawy because it was Papa, and he always was vewy nice, and I knew he wasn't a monster at all, so I only pwetended I was scawed when he did that. Are you scawed, Dino? I know you're not. How can you be? You're a dinosaur! Rawwwr! Wight? You have these teeth and claws and a long, heavy tail. You're vewy dangerous, but you are not a monster. I know that. You can beat any monster yourself, even the pig soldier, even if they have guns or axes, because your skin is vewy stwong, like armour or even better than armour. Actually, I think dinosaurs are scawy too, but not you, because I like you, and you're a good dinosaur. You're my fwiend, wight? Mama says I shouldn't be fwiends with scawy people, or dinosaurs, so I'm glad we can be fwiends, Dino. I was weally scawed here alone, and I cwied a little bit after Mama went out to get food, but with you, it's much better here. When she comes back, as she pwomised, you can be fwiends with her too. I have dolls, by the way, but I left them back at our home with my other toys and books and things. I would love to show them to you. I was vewy upset at first, but then I wealised that it would be vewy scawy for my dolls here because dolls fear dark castles and can't fight monsters, can they? Some of them can, but not mine. My favouwite doll's name is Mary, by the way. She's a ballewina. I think you two could be fwiends and—

An explosion of enormous energy from afar shook the room slightly; the walls and the ceiling crackled, and the plaster dusted the fortress from above. The warrior shuddered and hugged the dinosaur.

—Mama says these are fireworks, and we should not fear them, but I don't believe her because I'm not stupid, wight? And I saw fireworks myself, and they were never loud like these bangs out there.

The warrior looked around to assure there were no spies working for Mama watching her, and whispered to the dinosaur:

—I am sure these are bombs, Dino. I saw bombs on the telly when Mama and Papa were watching a vewy loud film, and I know what sound they make. They are vewy fun to watch on the telly, but I don't think I like when they are here. I think there should be no bombs because they are vewy scawy, and they kill people, and killing people is vewy, vewy bad. Everyone knows that. I asked Mama if we should kill monsters because monsters are also people sometimes, and she said that it is bad to kill anyone. But then I asked why Papa went killing monsters if it is bad, and then she said that Papa is pwotecting us from the monsters, and pwotecting from the monsters is good. So I couldn't decide if killing monsters is good or bad, and Mama told me that I will understand it better when I gwow up, but I think she doesn't understand that herself, even though she is vewy old and wise at her twenty-eight. All old people are sad, even when they smile, saying they are not sad. They always lie about it. My mama says she loves me even when she's sad, and I always say I love her too when I'm sad. Maybe sad people always love each other. She has become more sad when the bad things and fireworks started and Papa went to pwotect us from the monsters. She has begun saying that she loves me sometimes more than two times a day, and one day she even said that five times, and five times

is a lot, vewy a lot. Do your pawents love you, Dino? I think they do. You're vewy nice. I think they are two stwong and beautiful dinosaurs, just like you, but bigger and more adult, like my pawents. We both will gwow big as our pawents are and become wise and smart and brave and maybe also a little bit sad. Do you ever feel—

Vicious pieces of metal whistled somewhere close, and the warrior leaned over, clumping her ears shut, and thus kept that position for a few minutes. When the shooting ceased, the warrior peeked from the fortress onto the window and saw that a few holes had appeared on the sheet covering it, with the moonlight oozing into the room. The warrior invited the dinosaur to see them.

—Don't be scawed. My mama says I should play with my imagination to scawe away the fear. You see the window? Do you know the word "constelwation"? I love this word and the things it means. I think these white points on the window's sheet could be stars, a beautiful constelwation, maybe a dinosaur constelwation. See, they look like you, don't they? I don't know if there's a dinosaur constelwation already, but we can name this one after you. Why not? I think it's vewy gweat to have your own star, even if you can never weach it, because it is not shy, and you can still see it almost every night, and they are always there for you. Papa said they are vewy old, but I don't think they are sad, or maybe they are sad, but you can never tell they are sad. That's how bwight they are. You only see their shining and noth—

The hoof stomping rumbled in the corridor, its echo reaching the

fortress and causing a floorquake. And then something let out an unearthly squeal:

—Skreeeeeee-**snort**!

The door flew off its hinges, and a bulky humanoid figure with a pig's head, clad in dark armour and armed with a gun and an axe, entered the room, its tusks smeared in blood, its horns growing from under the helmet, its odious stench rapidly replacing the air.

—Skreeeee-**snort**!—the pig soldier squealed again and began sniffing.

Inside her fortress, the warrior held her breath and embraced the silence. The pig soldier lumbered around the room, seeking prey, scraping the wooden floor with its hooves.

Another explosion thundered outside, now closer, and the whole room shook. The pig soldier spotted the table covered with a blanket, sniffed loudly, squealed, and moved towards it. There, hidden inside the fortress, the warrior kept silent, her eyes and ears closed shut. Snarling and drooling, the monster flipped the table over in one blow, throwing it aside, revealing the immobilised warrior to the Darkness, her senses still paused.

—Skreeeeeee!

Drooling and screaming, its breath smelling like our garbage bin, the pig soldier prepared to end the warrior's life. But then, from the darkness, the dinosaur, now a few metres tall, colourfully feathered creature, leapt

out, roared, and plunged his sharp, white teeth right into the pig soldier's throat.

Haemorrhaging, the monster shuddered and attempted to kick the dinosaur away, but Dino strengthened his grip, clenching his jaws tighter and tighter until the soldier's neck's spine crunched, its swollen arteries burst, and warm, dark-red blood fountained into the room.

Warm droplets spattered the warrior's face, feeling like sticky, red raindrops. The air filled with a funny smell so strong, the warrior could almost taste rusty old pennies on her tongue.

The pig soldier's last breath wheezed out like a deflating balloon. Its final squeal faded into a gurgle like the last bit of bathwater going down the drain. Its head with milky-white eyes slumped down onto the floor beside his flabby, armoured body and rolled off. In the growing puddle of blood, little bubbles formed and popped, each one winking out with a tiny **bloop**. The moonlight caught the dark pool, making it shimmer like a gooey mirror.

Dead silence took over the room, and the warrior, shaking and sobbing, opened her eyes. Her hands trembled, her fingers feeling numb and tingly, like the look of a telly when it's all fuzzy. She saw the dinosaur looming over the dead pig soldier's body, his teeth covered in blood, his reptile eyes flashing in the little rays of red light coming through the holes in the window sheet.

Read next part

№3: It's Beginning to Thaw

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