

Ella McBella in the Dark

Laura Pells

Peter Trimarco

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Ella McBella in the Dark is a sensitive picture book that encourages the use of one's inner resources to confront, and conquer, fear.

In Laura Pells's enchanting picture book *Ella McBella in the Dark*, a girl conquers her fears with the help of cheery songs, books, and her faithful teddy bears.

Ella McBella is happy as long as the sun is out. She loves riding her bike as fast as she can and playing at the park. But once her mother has tucked her in for the night, Ella trembles with fear, sure that there are monsters everywhere. Their shadows are on the wall, strange noises are coming in from the garden, and Ella just wants to hide.

Written in the form of a lovely rhyming poem, the book is empowering. Ella, instead of running to her mother's arms, turns to her own resources, finding the courage that she needs. She sings joyful songs to her teddy bears and reads stories of courage until she's inspired to turn on a light and laugh; the scary wall monsters tumble off their perches, and the scary noises outside were made by nocturnal animals playing in the beautiful moonlight.

With a subtle lesson on the beauty of the night, and nighttime's importance to the balance of nature, the book also demonstrates how it is most often the lack of information that plays host to fears, and that anxiety can be banished by discovering and understanding the truth. Its graceful poem moves from Ella's rollicking good fun during the daytime to the fear she experiences at night: "And try as she might, Ella senses sure doom. / She can't fight these creatures alone in her room." As Ella's courage grows, the poem's soothing tones reflect her newfound peace.

The illustrations, many of them full-page, are an effective complement to the text. Delicate, expressive, and active, they use body language and facial expressions to portray Ella's movement from fear to understanding and peace. The contrast between Ella as she is during the day—playful, energetic, and smiling—and the way she appears after the lights have gone out is dramatic. The last illustration, which shows her enjoying a deep, peaceful sleep, brings the encouraging message that fearful children can overcome the "monsters" in their rooms.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (April 2, 2021)

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