



The Rhinoceros in Maribeth's Living Room (or How to Deal with Unlovely Things)

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Maribeth and Josie had lunch one day at the zoo cafe. Josie was speculating on getting a free look at some of the animals on their way out, when Maribeth remarked that the only animal you can see between the cafe and the front gate was the rhinoceros and they are such ugly creatures anyway, she preferred just to ignore it. Unfortunately for Maribeth, the rhinoceros heard her remark and took offense.

That evening when Josie took Maribeth home in their carpool, they found the rhinoceros in Maribeth's living room. "Maribeth," gasped Josie, "There's a rhinoceros in your living room." "No there's not," shot back Maribeth in her horror, and proceeded to convince her friend that she was tired and must be seeing things. After all, why would she have such a horrible monstrosity as a rhinoceros in her house? Then Maribeth chose to pretend the rhinoceros wasn't there herself, hoping it would go away by the morning.

The sun set and the moon rose and the stars twinkled all night. And when the sun rose the next morning, its light fell upon the rhinoceros still sitting in the middle of Maribeth's living room. Maribeth was beside herself, but she wasn't about to be done in by that beast. "I refuse to accept that a rhinoceros has taken up residence in my home," she said. So Maribeth continued to pretend the rhino was not there. This might have worked if she lived a lonely life, but Maribeth was something of a social butterfly.

At first Maribeth's co-workers tended to agree with her, that Josie was just tired and seeing things. However, when Dixie saw the rhino while dropping by a borrowed video and Pete saw it when he picked Maribeth up for a party, it became the talk of the office and simply all of her friends. Maribeth staunchly refused to admit that there was anything to these people's wild imaginings. This became a source of great amusement. "Hey, Maribeth. Is there a rhinoceros in your house?" "No!" Maribeth would reply to gales of laughter. Soon people from throughout Maribeth's town were slowly driving past her place in order to get a peek at the rhinoceros through the windows.

The last straw came when Maribeth found rhino footprints in her butter and her bottle of cherry red fingernail polish was empty because the creature had used it to paint its toes. "You horrible, horrible monster!" she came screaming out of the bathroom. She pounded on it as hard as she could with her fists and kicked it a few times. "Why are you ruining my life so?" It was the first time Maribeth had acknowledged its existence. The rhinoceros turned its head and looked deeply into Maribeth's eyes. "I do nothing that ruins your life. You ruin it yourself," said the rhinoceros in its thick syrupy voice.

Maribeth was livid. She threw her clothes on and stomped off to work. That night she began a program of trying to get rid of the rhinoceros. Some evenings she would try pushing the animal out. Other evenings she would try pulling it out. On the weekends she would get more creative and try luring it out with various rhino delicacies, but to no avail. She no longer saw her friends because she was too busy worrying about the rhinoceros, and besides she couldn't stand to hear anyone mention it. Nevertheless, no matter how much she tried nothing could budge the rhinoceros from her living room.

As summer green turned to autumn gold and the autumn gold turned again to the crystalline white of winter, Maribeth had given up on trying to either ignore or move the rhinoceros. Some nights she would share her popcorn with it while watching a video. Upon particularly cold evenings she would cuddle up next to it with a book in one hand and a cup of cocoa in the other. And once in a while when she had had a bad day, she would cry into the rhinoceros' rough hide and tell it all of her troubles. She got used to the creature. She found that it was nice having something to come home to. Once the rhinoceros no longer bothered her she started making friends again, and she liked these friends better than any she had before. However, no matter how much Maribeth socialised, she always made sure to leave some time each week to spend with her rhino.

Then, one day in spring, she came home and the rhinoceros was gone.