

THE FLATS
By Frank Tupta

Word Count: 513

Some neighborhoods have houses with backyards. Others have parks and playgrounds.

Here in the Flats, I have my monsters.

We live way up high.

Clouds up top and clouds down low, that's the Flats.

But I don't mind, because I can see my monsters.

"Benny! Breakfast." Mom calls.

Had to go in early. On for a double. Have a great day. - Dad
(Art Note: boy sees not sitting on the table)

Mom rubs my head.

Dad usually pours two cups. One for me and one for him. Except mine's mostly milk. Sometimes he gives me a splash of coffee when mom's not looking.

"Our secret," he says. And then he asks me about my day.

Outside I can hear the gulls scrapping with the pigeons in the alley behind the bakery.
(Art Note: Waiting for the bus to school)

And from deep down in the fog, the day begins....

A whistle blows.

A horn blares.

An engine growls.

Some folks say it's too noisy here. But not me. That's just the Flats.

I sit in the third row on the right. Always.
(Art Note: riding in a school bus over a big bridge into the city)

Then I wait....

A siren buzzes below.

My hands press against the cool glass.

And there they are.

Sid's rusted beak peeks through the fog.

(Art Note: jack knife bridge)

He looks right at me.

And then disappears.

Bridgette bursts through next, floating above the clouds. And then she's gone.

(Art Note: lift bridge)

And finally, there he is—

Cedric.

(Art Note: swing bridge)

My favorite.

Bright blue, he spins, twirling and swirling through the haze.

We get to the other side of the bridge, and I wave goodbye to my monsters.

Until tomorrow....

After school, me and Mom walk up the stairs to our apartment.

"Just us again?"

"Just you and me, Sweet Pea."

Later, I lay awake in bed.

I think about my monsters.

Do they come out at night?

Do they sleep?

A singing siren cuts through the honking traffic outside my window.

I listened closely as the sounds of the Flats help me drift off to sleep.

(Art Note: wakes up, looks for note, nothing there, hug from mom)

Today, the city's painted orange and yellow.

(Art Note: construction signs)

We can't cross the bridge.

The bus turns.

And down,

down,

down we go,

below the fog...

...to where my monsters live.

I hold my breath.

I've never been below the fog bank.

It's dark and dirty.

Suddenly, there's a BUZZ, BUZZ, BUZZ...

...and the bus begins to rumble.

Cedric.

I stare up at him.

He swings back, connecting us to town.

The traffic starts to move as we cross.

Up.

Up.

Up we go.

Into the city.

I look down below.

Cedric's red light blinks at me. He swings back around through the clouds of puffy white.

And then he's gone. Lost in the endless fog.

A ship's horn blares.

A truck's engine growls.

A train whistle blows.

The sun peeks out and shines down on my monsters.

The fog disappears.

And I can see them. All of them.

Sid. Bridgette. Cedric.

And they can see me.

Just before we turn the corner, I see Cedric wink at me.

I race home from school...

...and there he is.

Me. Dad. And two big cups.

"Hey, Buddy," he says, smiling.

Tell me about your day.

And I do.