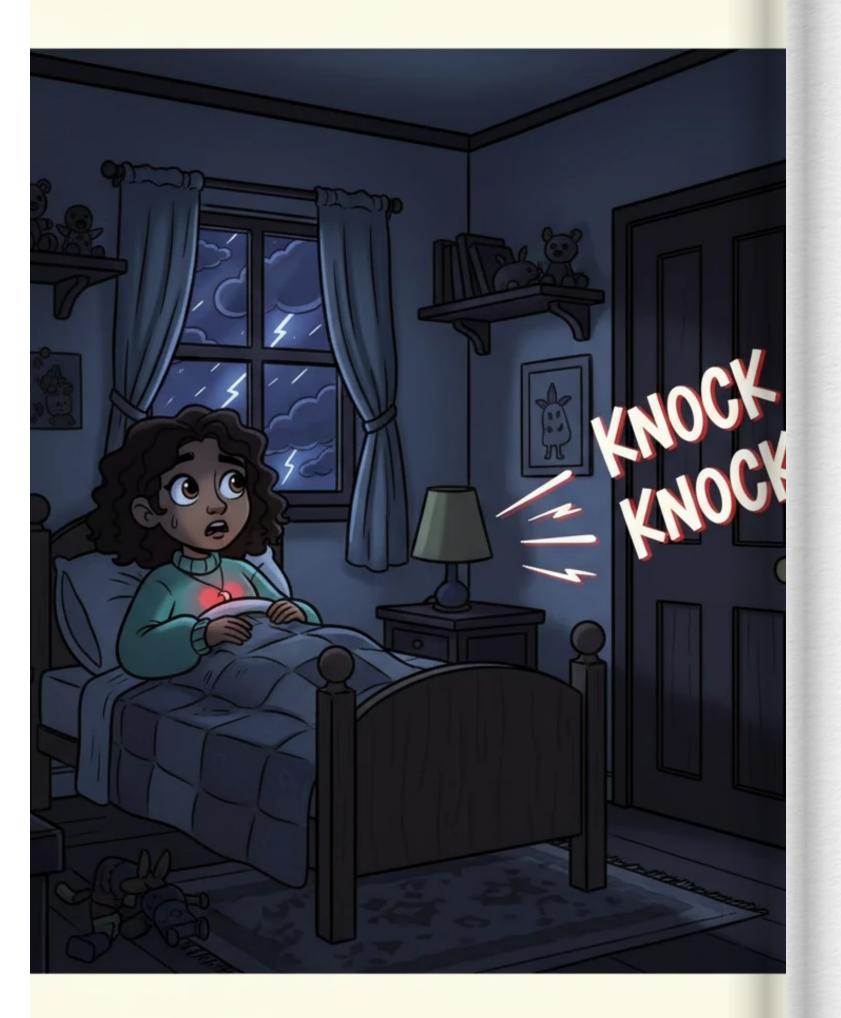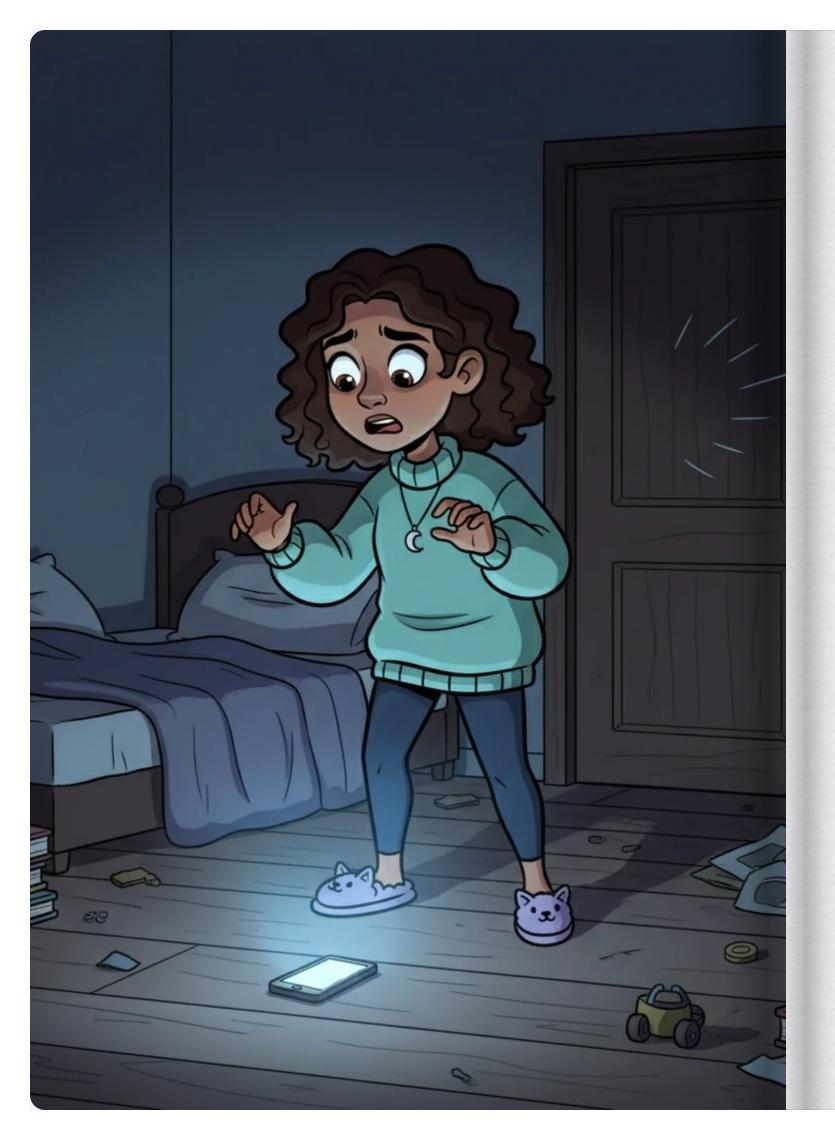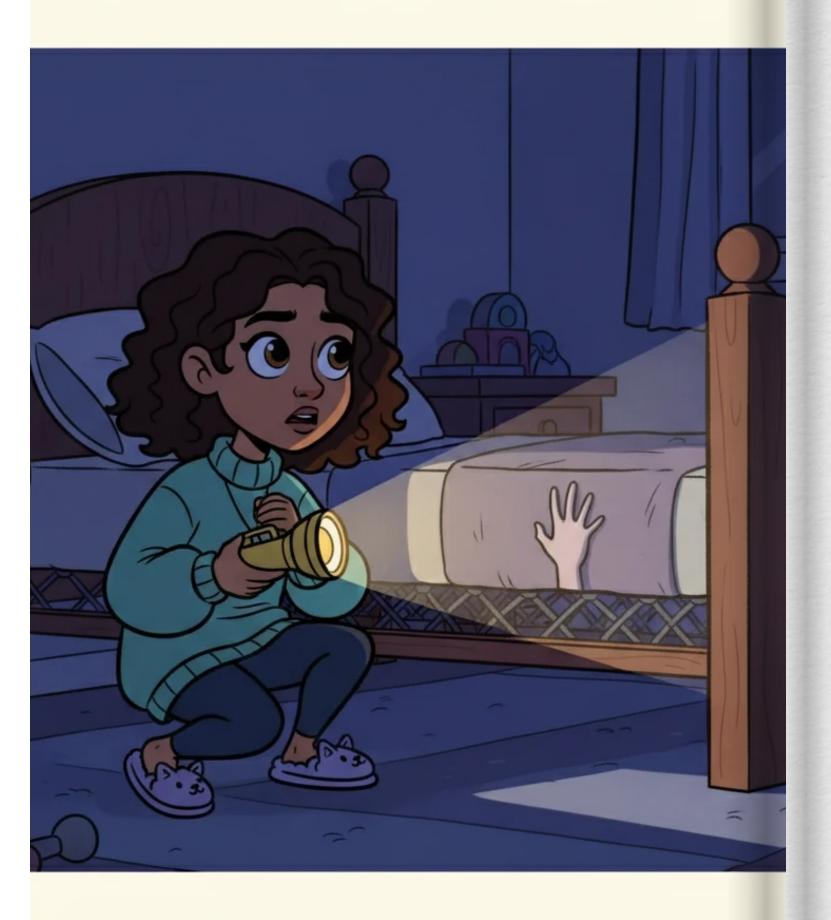The Whispering Under the Bed

by Alviya Fatima

The rain hammered against the windows of Mira's small apartment, a familiar comfort, until a sound broke through the rhythmic drumming: knock, knock, knock. It came from under her bed, a slow, deliberate rhythm that sent a shiver down her spine. The old warning from her mother, years ago, echoed in her mind: 'Don't answer it.'

Fifteen years had passed since her mother's words, and Mira had long since dismissed monsters as childish fantasies. Yet, the persistent knocking grew louder, a chilling summons that filled the tiny space. She lay frozen in her bed, her heart pounding a frantic tattoo against her ribs, the sound amplifying the silence of the storm.

A text message, vibrating urgently on her phone, broke the spell of fear. It read: 'It's cold down here.' Her fingers fumbled as she dropped the phone, the screen illuminating the dark room for a fleeting moment. A soft knock came then, a question, urging her to interact.

Gathering her courage, Mira grabbed her flashlight and slowly crouched beside the bed, shining the beam into the shadows. A small, pale hand was pressed against the underside of the mattress. A whisper, barely audible, escaped her lips, 'Who's there?'

She scrambled backward, the light shaking in her hand as she stumbled, knocking against her dresser. Another text. The bed, she realized with a gasp, had been moved from the wall. Now there was just enough room... Then the lights flickered and died. A voice, small and frail, whispered from the darkness: 'You left me here.'

Lightning flashed, momentarily illuminating the room, revealing a girl with gray, cracked skin, staring with wide, glassy eyes. Before the next wave of darkness consumed the apartment, she saw the girl's head tilt and heard, 'I was cold. But now you're warm.' The next morning, the police found the bed shoved against the wall and two sets of footprints, one entering... and one never leaving.