

You will find Lough Neagh quite easily on the map of Ireland. It is at the top right-hand side, in the middle of the province of Ulster, and you will certainly see it if you look out of the window as you come in to land at Belfast International Airport.

On a wild day it has waves as high as walls. On a quiet day it lies like a jewel under the ever-changing sky. Lough Neagh is vast and beautiful; there could be no finer home for a huge beast than this place, the largest inland water in all of Europe.

Why, then, have we never heard of the Lough Neagh monster?

Well, think of the differences within families. One child is loud and noisy, the other is shy. One is clever at sums and music, the other is good with her hands and never has her nose out of a book. They are not the same.

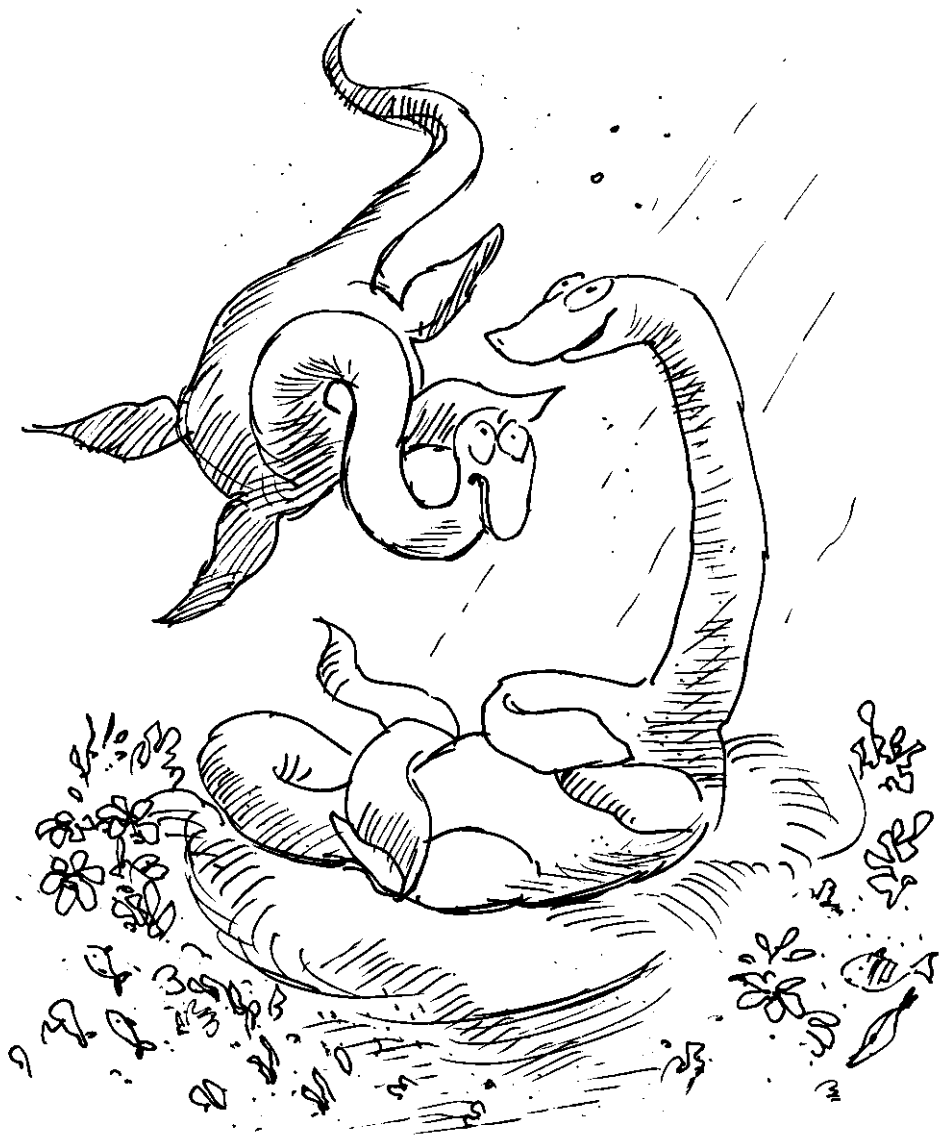
And so it is with monsters. They are not all the same. The monster in Lough Neagh never ate washing or scared old people wrapped up in their car rugs. And, by the way, he never had bad dreams about an underwater zoo, because he knew that hardly anyone had the faintest

idea that he even existed. This was exactly how Noblett, the Lough Neagh monster, wanted things to be: peaceful and quiet.

Then one day he returned to his cave to find that he had a visitor.

‘Hello there, Nobby, my old dodo,’ said a familiar voice, ‘how are you keeping? It’s me – are you pleased? It must be, oh, a hundred years since I saw you last.’

It *was* a hundred years, but they seemed like only yesterday to Noblett. On that last visit his wild cousin Nessie had eaten a whole thatched roof in County Tyrone and caused him no end of trouble.



‘What do you want?’ he said.

‘Don’t you think we should keep in touch, for goodness sake,’ said Nessie, settling herself on the only bed. (She did not reveal that half of Scotland was looking for her with cameras and underwater probes.) ‘You don’t mind if I sleep here, do you, Nobby? It’s such a long swim to your place, you’ve no idea. And then in the morning – we’ll get up and have ourselves some *fun*. Aren’t you pleased?’

Poor Noblett closed his eyes as he leaned against the wall of his cave, but not because he was tired. He was trying to stop thinking about that word 'fun'.

Please let it rain, he thought. There'll be nobody about and they won't see her and she'll get bored stiff and she'll go back home. Let it rain and rain and let the north wind blow.