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Monster Hotline

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Monster Hotline

Poetry • Ben Gamble

Excuse me, sir,
I was told to call here with concerns
about being a monster.

Yes, sir,
I have already self-examined for the more obvious signs.
I do not—generally—hide myself in the darkness
under the bed or in the closet.

My haircutter did not need
to clip any ram's horns from my scalp last week
and I have not felt the discomfort
of a red barbed tail when I sit down.

Similarly, sir, I simply lack the architectural skills
necessary to build a house of candy
so that I could lure children to their death
(and I do not own an oven, anyhow).

I am regularly mocked for
ordering steaks well-done and thus
do not think I could drink blood
as my primary means of sustenance.

Beyond some crookedness within the parameters
of acceptable orthodontics,
my teeth have not approximated themselves into fangs
and if I could breathe fire
I imagine it would be easier
for my shaking hands to light a cigarette.

When I touch my skin I feel no scales, sir,
and I have not needed prescription contacts
for yellowed reptilian slits of any kind.
So I am reasonably confident
that I am not a basilisk,

but people seem to tense when our eyes meet
and every dawn I feel a little more dead.

I am fine

walking around in sunlight
and I have no qualms handling my mother's silver.
Even so, sir, I do not see myself in mirrors any longer
and anything like a church
does not seem to want me there.

Sir, my home is one-story and therefore
not ideal for the detainment of distressed damsels.
But I do not think for that purpose I need a tower or moat.
I never took her,
no sir.
But she ran as soon as someone came to her rescue
and she has never grown her hair long again.

Sir,

I am calling because I feel there may be
something subtler—something I have missed

like for example the fleeting thought
that I could push the old neighbor
dawdling before me down a flight of stairs,
breaking at least some teeth
but more probably a brittle bone
with each collision of his body against the steps.
and then—its sister thought
that the acoustics of the stairwell are such
that his broken bones would find his lungs and veins
before our neighbors found him.

or sir knowing that
my arms and hands can produce enough torque and turn
to snap the spine of the girl who fell asleep
beside me on the metro.
she would wake up, sir, as my hands touched her neck
but it would be too late. it would be too late.

sir
i am also aware
that if the metro station were empty as we walked out
i could do far worse things.

i could do anything.

and there would be no knights in shining armor
or fairy godmothers
or happy ever afters.

there would just be me.

These are not thoughts that I want, sir,
but I am afraid that they want me.

Sir, if there is nothing
you can do I understand.
There are other hotlines—
though the AA frowns upon finishing off spirits,
and I think the suicide hotline and I
may have fundamentally different objectives.

If, sir,
I could ask one last favor
Does your organization cooperate to any extent
with the monster-slaying hotline?
If so, I would appreciate their number
and then I can stop being such a pain
and let you get to your next call.

Thank you for listening, sir.
There are not many people I can talk with these things about.
I only ask if you see my name in the paper
or, worse, if you don't,
please remember that I tried.