

# 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.