

Monsters are Made in the Minds of Men

a play by Ryan M. Bultrowicz

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A small house. There are boxes of monster-hunting gear and miscellaneous items everywhere. Additionally, there are books scattered everywhere and there's a large bookcase filled with books and more clutter. CAMILA and LIAM are organizing and sorting through the items.

CAMILA

He was obsessed with the idea that man-eating monsters like wendigoes and skunk apes have been hiding in the shadows, silently tormenting the human race for centuries.

LIAM

Skunk apes? One half skunk, one half ape! Can you imagine the smell?

CAMILA

Dad spent a year in the Everglades chasing after that smell.

LIAM

When you told me your dad was into monsters I thought you meant, like, in the movies. The Creature From the Black Lagoon! Nosferatu! The Wolf Man!

LIAM howls.

CAMILA

It's much easier to let people think that.

LIAM

He really believed all of this? Like actually?

CAMILA

Either that or it was way too specific of an excuse to avoid spending time with his family.

LIAM

And what about you? Do you believe in...

LIAM picks up an animal skull from a box and holds it up to CAMILA's face.

LIAM

El Chupacabra!

CAMILA takes the skull from him and puts it back in the box.

CAMILA

Come on.

LIAM

It's an honest question! There are some monsters that I believe in.

CAMILA
Don't even say that.

LIAM
There are.

CAMILA
What monster do you believe in?

LIAM
...Student loan debt.

CAMILA
Stop kidding around.

LIAM
I'm not. I have nightmares about student loan debt. They're very spooky.

CAMILA
Liam.

LIAM
Alright, alright. I'm just trying to keep things light. You're clearly not in the mood for my charming wit.

CAMILA
All of this is fun and interesting to you – but for me this is all of the stuff that my dad chose to prioritize over me.

LIAM
Okay, you're right. I apologize. I just had no idea about any of this and I've never seen a...

LIAM is digging around in some sort of toolbox.

LIAM
Whatever this is.

CAMILA
It's a vampire hunting kit.

LIAM
This is a vampire hunting kit? Amazing.

CAMILA ignores him and continues searching through boxes.

LIAM

Um. Are you looking for something specific?

CAMILA

Yes.

LIAM

Can I help?

CAMILA

If you find any of his journals let me know.

LIAM

Oh. Wait.

LIAM looks around for a moment and then finds a shoebox. He hands it to CAMILA.

LIAM

I saw them earlier. There's like four notebooks in there.

CAMILA sits down with the shoebox and begins flipping through the notebooks. LIAM wanders around the room – touching everything.

CAMILA

UGHHHH.

LIAM

What's wrong?

CAMILA

It's gibberish. It just says "shape". Over and over and over and over. In all these books.

LIAM

Seriously?

LIAM peers over her shoulder at one of the journals.

LIAM

Woah. Alright, that's kind of creepy. And meticulous.

CAMILA

It's stupid.

LIAM

What were you hoping to find in there anyway?

CAMILA

Nothing specific. Just something that would...I don't know...make me less angry at him.

LIAM

An apology.

CAMILA

I don't know.

Pause.

CAMILA

This is really another great example of his priorities. Monster hunting and filling up four journals with just one word. He spent his time doing this. He didn't even know my birthday, you know?

LIAM

I'm sure he knew your birthday.

CAMILA

If he did then he just willfully chose to ignore it. Which is even more depressing.

LIAM

...What was his personality like?

CAMILA

He was awkward. It's like he was always nervous to be talking to us. That's how much we scared him – his family.

LIAM

Maybe he thought, like, what if you guys were shapeshifters?

CAMILA

What?

LIAM

What if he was living with monsters all along? What if you and your mother were the monsters? Like if the real you got replaced one day by this evil shapeshifting demon?

CAMILA

You think I'm a shapeshifting demon, Liam?

LIAM

No. I don't think that. Because I know it would be impossible for a shapeshifting demon...to capture your beauty. They wouldn't be able to get it right – it's as simple as that.

CAMILA

Wow. Thank you for that...distinguished compliment.

LIAM

I'm serious though.

CAMILA

About what part of any of that are you serious about?

LIAM

I think, it's feasible, that your father thought you were a monster. A real monster. Not like a bratty, whiny, monster of a child.

CAMILA

Why would he think that?

LIAM

I don't – okay, just think about it. He was clearly insane. Like literally, diagnosably, a lunatic.

CAMILA

We can agree on that.

LIAM

And he was obsessed with monsters, and like you said, the idea of them being all around us. Hidden just out of sight...or...hiding in plain sight.

CAMILA

As shapeshifters.

LIAM

Right. That would explain why he never talked to you or was nervous or scared talking to you. That would explain why he was always focused on all this monster stuff – he was looking for a way to bring you guys back or find out where you went when the evil shapeshifting monster demon things replaced you guys! That would explain why he wrote down the word “shape” over and over again!

CAMILA

Not really. It's just one word. It doesn't make any sense.

LIAM

Yes. This is just one word over and over. Agreed. But I think what he wanted it to be was his notes on how to bring you guys back or whatever! Or his notes on how to defeat the shapeshifters! Either one. But obviously...he had issues.

CAMILA

That's a very creative way to excuse the negligence of my father and instead convert him into the hero of the story.

LIAM

I'm not saying he's the hero. I'm suggesting that maybe there was no hero and there was no villain. There was just a sick man who had a twisted view on reality that tragically ruined his relationships and consequently his life.

CAMILA

Why wouldn't he just have killed us then?

LIAM

...I don't know. Maybe you can't kill shapeshifters – at least not in a conventional way. You probably have to recite some ancient incantations and sacrifice a goat or something. Maybe it would've been too much to even kill something that resembles your loved ones...I'm glad he didn't kill anyone.

Pause.

CAMILA

...He didn't always ignore us. There were good moments. Better moments, at least. But they were few and far between.

LIAM

I want to hear one.

CAMILA

What?

LIAM

A good memory.

CAMILA

They're hardly memories. Just snapshots in my brain – if that makes any sense.

LIAM

I want to hear about the snapshots then. Come on.

CAMILA

Okay. Well. There was this one day...he actually baked us...I think it was an apple pie. I was really little. He danced with my mom. Then I joined them. We spun in circles and my mom fell. A soft fall – and she laughed until she cried. The sun was beaming in through our windows. Yeah.

LIAM

See? That is nice.

CAMILA

It was rare.

LIAM

Well, when our kids ask about their grandpa and grandma – you can tell them that.

CAMILA

Our kids?

LIAM

We're getting married. Kids are the next logical step.

CAMILA

I don't know about that.

LIAM

What? You want kids. We've discussed this.

CAMILIA

Okay, first of all – I'm allowed to change my mind about something like that. Second of all, I said I'd be open to having a kid. Not kids.

LIAM

You can't just have one.

CAMILA

Oh?

LIAM

It's like an unspoken rule.

CAMILA

Unspoken because you just made it up?

LIAM

It's a thing. Otherwise you get an only child who's lonely and weird.

CAMILA

Am I lonely and weird then?

LIAM

...No. No, I didn't mean you. I mean, you're an only child yes but you have the spirit of someone who had lots of siblings. It's how you turned out so awesome!

CAMILA

Awful save.

LIAM

Kids or no kids. I'm just happy to be with you.

CAMILA

Your nice.

LIAM

I try.

CAMILA

Thank you for trying.

LIAM

Well, being nice is really the least I can do as-

CAMILA

No. Thank you for trying to make me feel better about my father.

Pause.

CAMILA

You're right about some of it.

LIAM

I am?

CAMILA

Nobody had any idea what was going on in his head. All my life, I've mostly felt angry at him. But being here, with you, seeing all of this...all of this...I don't know. I'm still angry but I feel sad for him too. Clearly...there was a war going on, A one-sided war inside my father's brain. I think it's time to end it, once and for all.

LIAM

Yeah?

CAMILA

Yeah. We're going to get rid of all of this stuff. We're going to kill these monsters for good. They're never going to hurt anybody ever again.

LIAM

We're throwing away everything? Even the cool vampire hunting kit?

CAMILA

Especially the vampire hunting kit.

They smile at each other and start picking up some of the clutter.

BLACKOUT