

Where There Be Monsters

by Stephen Heger

"C'mon Billy, don't be s-s-s-s-scared." said the voice coming from under the bed. Billy looked over the side and saw a pale white, bony right hand with it's forefinger beckoning him protruding out from below. The nails were yellowed and cracked. And long. Very, very long. He sat himself back up and centered himself in his bed as best he could. He tried with all his might to not wonder what the rest of the monster looked like to no avail. Pictures of the hand attached to a hundred armed, thousand eyed beast with the skin of a slug or an emaciated demon with thin, sinewy appendages and fangs and horns as pointed as knives played over and over in his mind.

"I'm not scared. Go away." Billy said.

"I'm not gonna hu-u-u-u-urt you, Billy." the voice said again. "I jus-s-s-st want you to play with me."

"I don't think I want to." said Billy. "Why can't you just leave me alone? Go find someone else to bother."

The light that poked through the gap in the curtains cast just enough light for him to barely make out the objects of the room. This coupled with the eerie glow that came from under his bed was always disconcerting to him. At least there was only the one this night Billy thought. When it's two or more monsters you start getting the in-fighting and the one-upsmanship and they prattle on and on all night about themselves and forget their objective for being there. Billy looked over at the door and knew that even if he could get to it without being snared by the monster under his bed that the door would be locked. Even though his fate with the monster was uncertain, it was no more uncertain than why his parents had even had him.

“Why don't you come out from under there so I can see you? Are you s-s-s-s-scared?” Billy asked, mocking the monster.

Billy no longer screamed or cried or hid under the bed sheets. He was too old for that now. Although he was still admittedly frightened of what the monsters actually looked like. He was more afraid of what his imagination played them out to be than anything else. In all the years that they had visited him he had only glimpsed their arms protruding from under the bed attempting to coax him from the safety of his retreat.

“That's not nic-c-c-c-ce Billy. Not nice at all.” the monster said. “Be careful of your tone or I jus-s-s-s-st might.”

Billy thought what it would be like to just step down and let the monster gobble him up or do whatever it is they do with the children they abscond with. It's not as if his parents would even miss him. It's always “Be quiet.” or “Go to your room.” and “Children should be seen and not heard”. And that's only if they're around and not off on some adventure that he was continually told he was too young to enjoy.

“As if that will happen. You monsters need to come up with a new routine.” Billy said. “It may not be much fun living here but it's better than being torn apart, chewed up and ending up in the belly of one of you.”

Billy had thought several times that to get the best of his parents he would just hop down and let the chips fall where they may. But he knew that their lives would hardly be affected by his absence. They might even take actual joy in not having to have to tolerate his existence. Talk about a plan back-firing. Although, in the back of his mind he also wondered if the monsters were telling the truth.

“In our bellys-s-s-s-s? Oh, heavens no, Billy. We have candy and play games and go off on wonderful adventures with all the other children that are here. It's a paradis-s-s-s-se.”

“Then let me see you.” Billy said. “It's as simple a request as you ask of me.”

“See? Candy.” the monster said holding out his other arm while his left disappeared back under the bed. His palm was filled with half-melted Hershey's kisses and a partially eaten Kit-Kat bar. “And balloons-s-s-s-s.” The monster's left hand reappeared and a balloon shot up and hung in front of Billy tethered from below. On the balloon was a smiley face painted in a substance that Billy wasn't sure he wanted to know was.

“I don't care about candy and I certainly don't care about balloons.” Billy stated curtly and crossed his arms in defiance. “And I know there's no kids under there to play with.”

That part of the promise always piqued Billy's interest the most. He had never had any friends. Billy was never let outside the confines of the estate and was home-schooled by a shrewd and shriveled up old thing named Miss Pettibon. His only friends he could ever attest to were of the imaginary kind spawned from books.

“There's-s-s-s-s a lot of kids to play with.” the voice from under the bed said.

“Then let me talk to them.” Billy said and crept back toward the edge of the bed, looked down and waited.

“I have little Tim right he-e-e-e-ere. Just a moment.” the monster said.

As Billy looked over the side he heard shuffling and scraping from under the bed mingled with a bit of scratching and grunts.

“Well, I'm waiting.” said Billy in mock anticipation.

“He's almos-s-s-s-st here.” the monster said with labored breaths in between each word. “Ahhhh, here he is.”

Billy saw a crop of hair and then a forehead slowly appearing from below his bed. This was followed by pale, lifeless eyes that seemed to roll around in their sockets, a nose and then a mouth partially open with a swollen tongue lolling to the left.

“Hi Billy. My name's Tim.” a high-pitched voice said from under the bed. The mouth opened and closed like a fish suffocating out of water. Billy leaned out and down a bit further and he saw the hand of the monster jammed into the severed neck of Tim like a puppet.

“That's gross.” said Billy. “Not only that, that's about the worst ventriloquism I've ever seen and heard. I mean really.”

“We have so much fun under here, Billy.” the monster said still trying to keep in character. His voice vascillating between that of the high-pitched Timmy and his gravelly bellow. “We eat candy and play games and go with the monsters and visit other kids. It's so-o-o-o much fun.”

“I can see your hand. Your horrible at this monster stuff.” said Billy. “I could do it a thousand times better.”

“No you couldn't.” the monster said, finally breaking character. “There's lots of training and classes and studying and there's even a test.”

"A test you obviously failed." said Billy sharply. "I'm quite sure you're completely unqualified for this job."

"That's just mean." said the monster. "Take that back."

"No. This whole thing is just ridiculous." Billy said frustrated as he shifted position on the bed to get a bit more comfortable. "You or one of your kind comes in here every other night for as long as I can remember trying to convince me to ultimately let you use my severed head as a puppet like ill-fated Tim there and you can't do it."

"Yeah? Well, your parents don't love you." said the monster.

Billy had imagined that hearing that out loud would sting a lot more than it did. He knew it didn't sting because he knew it was true. He'd known and lived it for a long time but the part that truly made him sad was that he had embraced that fact as long ago as he had. There was no retort or comeback for what the monster had said. He knew you can't debate a fact. But it was at that moment that an idea that had been wedged way back in his mind sprung forth and presented itself.

"Well, you've got me there." said Billy. "So, since we're being honest here I have a question."

"Ugh." the monster said in exasperation. "What is it?"

"Are all the monsters under the beds and in the closets of children's bedrooms as smart as you? I mean, how did they do on their tests?" Billy asked.

Billy was still leaning over the bed peering at the decapitated head of Tim when it quickly disappeared. In its place the head of the monster jutted out from under the bed. Two beady black eyes set

too close together above a pinched nose and a mouth as wide as its head stared up at him. The mouth was filled with what seemed like a thousand sewing needles instead of teeth and matched the sharpness of the horns atop his head. The monster's face seemed to light up a bit and his pointy ears twitched in giddiness that the conversation had become about him.

"Well, I was at the top of my class." the monster said, his voice perking up a bit. "Right now I'm in charge of this whole area but in a year or two I hope to be head of the region. In fact, I was brought in to handle your case because anyone we have sent over here has failed miserably."

"I see." Billy said. His brow furrowed, his nose squinched up and he carefully chose his words. "So, say I was to come with you, instead of melted chocolates, balloons and bad puppetry, could I get anything I wanted?"

"Well, I'm sure something could be worked out. I mean, we may be monsters but it's not like we're politicians."

Billy mulled his options over in his head for a few seconds and said "Okay then," He sat up and then stepped onto the cold, wooden floor. "This is what I want-"

"What's that?" exclaimed Evelyn after being woken from a deep sleep. She sat up on her elbows and looked around the pitch black room trying to adjust her eyes and concentrate on where the sound was coming from. As she sat there in the dark, the silence began fraying at her nerves more than the noise did that had woken her.

"Wake up." Evelyn said in unison with driving her elbow into the side of her husband softly snoring away next to her.

“Huh? Wha-” grunted Patrick who lifted his head slightly up and could do no more to assist.

“I heard something.” Evelyn said to him. “I can't tell where it's coming from.”

“It's probably nothing. Just a car backfiring or some kids in the neighborhood.” said Patrick as he laid his head back down on the pillow.

Evelyn sat herself fully up and continued listening as intently as she could for the sound.

A deep meaty slap and then the sound of metal being drug across the hardwood floor echoed from under the bed.

“There it is again!” Evelyn said loudly as she began shoving Patrick awake. A slight blue light began emanating from under the bed and cast the room in an eerie glow.

Patrick rolled over onto his back and opened his eyes slowly as the sickly sound came again. The impact of raw flesh, the echo of metal tearing into wood but followed this time by a deep, gravelly laugh.

Patrick's and Evelyn's eyes went wide and their hearts began to beat in their chests. The sound was coming from under their bed.

“Who is that!?” Patrick said as he quickly sat up. “Who's there?”

They each leaned over their respective sides of the bed and looked down at the floor.

From underneath the bed, two heads began to slowly appear and a voice from under the bed said "Hello-o-o-o-o mother and father. It's me, Billy, and I brought my friend Tim."

