

Making Monsters

By Paul Lister

(Writing as Saul P Tiler)

Beth let the phone ring. It was comforting. It felt like home. The plastic muzak ringtone reminded her of LA and Faulkner. It wasn't his real name. No self-respecting actor would stick with a name like 'Clovis' and when he became famous he didn't stick with her either. But Clovis left her with something before he left. Megan.

Beth listened as her daughter shuffled around upstairs in her bedroom, procrastinating instead of doing her school assignments. Megan had not wanted to come to New York but the only other choice was to live with her father and his new wife. New, as in 'not Beth' and new as in 'hasn't really been on the planet much longer than his teenage daughter'.

Megan hated the idea of calling someone who had barely graduated 'Mom'. So now they were here. In a house in the country, far away from an ageist husband, but not so secluded that the cell phone network couldn't get to you. Beth knew she had to answer. She knew she had to speak to the studio. She knew she had to talk about horror.

The 'Monster Mash' played through the phone speaker again as the Studio Executives tried to reach her, the device wiggling its way across the pine step on which she sat at the bottom of the stairs.

Beth glanced at the frosted glass of the front door. She thought she saw movement in the darkness beyond, but there was nothing there. The phone nudged her thigh and Beth reluctantly took the call.

"Hey Marty, sorry I was in the bath."

"Three days Betty."

"I know, I'm onto something, I just need to dot the t's and cross the i's."

"Don't treat me like a mark, I need a pitch."

"And you'll have one Marty, in three days. No one's doing monsters anymore, they've been beaten to death. I just need to find a new perspective."

"You're a good writer kid, but for this you don't have to be, just give me something that the average Walmart shopper will spend twenty bucks on. How about Zombies, everything's undead this and undead that. Kids love them."

"It's played out."

"Bullshit, just find a new slant. Christ if they can make a film about Sharks in a goddamn thunderstorm we can do a zombie movie."

Another movement, this time Beth was sure there was someone outside.

"Three days Betty, or we lose the funding. I need a killer story."

The phone darkened as Marty cut the connection from the other end. Beth slipped the device into her pocket and moved to the door, flicking the lobby light on as she did so.

A shape was illuminated on the other side. Through the crumpled panes a hooded boy stood and from what Beth could see it may have been a friend of Megan's from the new school.

"Craig?" she asked.

The youth grunted.

Beth quietly slid the security chain into place and opened the door.

Craig's face was cast in shadow by the peak of his tracksuit hood.

"Megan" he said quietly, the syllables a little too long. A thin line of drool fell from his bottom lip as he spoke, but he seemed oblivious to it.

"I'm afraid Megan cannot come out Craig, she has homework and to be honest it's a little late don't you think?"

The boy grunted and then turned, whispering her daughter's name again. She could see others in the darkness beyond the porch, swaying slightly in the moonlight. Probably as drunk as he was, Beth thought. She closed the door and bolted it, not bothering to hide

the noise this time. In the milky lunar illumination, she could see the figures begin to move around the house, moaning Megan's name. Simultaneously there was movement from upstairs.

If Megan thought she was going to get away with sneaking out of the bedroom window, then she had another think coming. Beth walked up to the first floor landing and stood outside her daughter's door. She pressed her ear softly against the wood panelling, trying to hear evidence of escape. Beth cried out as the door shook with the sudden impact of a blow from within, it was closely followed by a despairing moan from beyond the door. She opened the door to find Megan standing in the middle of the room. It was dimly lit by a laptop screen, the flickering light illuminating the carpet of thrown text books.

"Megan, I know you know your friends are here but you're not going anywhere until you've done your homework."

Her daughter's arms slowly raised in parallel and a low moan emitted from her lips. She was dark under the eyes and her skin was pale. She could probably do with spending some time out in the daylight, there wasn't much vitamin D in You Tube and Twitter.

"And you can cut that out young lady, hugs might have worked when you were little and had tantrums but it isn't going to cut the mustard when you're thirteen young lady. Homework now."

Beth promptly exited the bedroom before her resolve waivered. The move had been hard on both of them but Megan wrecking her education as well was not going to help. Beth knelt down and peered through the keyhole. Her child turned back to the scattered school books and slumped down into her chair, staring at the confusing sentences on the computer screen. Megan ran her hands through her

greasy tresses, pulling at the hair and saying the words "Brains...Brains", over and over again in a frustrated manner.

Beth felt worse as she walked back down the stairs but it was for the girl's own good. The youths outside had congregated near the windows now and were placing greasy palms against the glass. Beth shooed them away and waved the phone, mouthing the words 'I'm calling your parents' at them as she did so and turned the lobby lights off. Eventually they shuffled away as her daughter's perpetual whining ceased and the house was quiet again. Beth sat on the stairs the phone unusually silent in her pocket. She had three days to get the pitch together. Zombies, Christ. They had been done to death.

"I don't want to do this Georgie, I thought we would be together forever," said Cory, his mother's gun heavy in his hand. His aim was shaky, the muzzle of the gun struggling to point at the love of his life.

Georgia Young had momentarily become lucid again, the Zombie curse temporarily passing back into the darkness hidden within. And Cory knew that wherever that darkness was, it was far from her true heart.

Georgia looked around at the dead soldiers around her, young men that had not believed in the undead and fired round after round into her body instead of her brain. Tears fell from her eyes as she wept for the lost lives that she had taken.

And then she saw Cory.

It took her a moment to register that he was pointing a gun at her, but then she smiled. If anyone was going to take this curse away it would be him. He loved her enough to kill her.

"I want you to do it Cory, I can die with you, but I can't live in death without you."

Cory's hand shook more as the tears begun to well up.

"I can't do it Georgie, I can't"

She knew what she had to do, even though it would break her heart, even though it would kill her. Forever this time.

"Then kiss me Cory, kiss me one last time."

Cory watched as his love walked toward him with a sad smile on her lips, her arms raised to hug him again. But as she got closer to Cory, her mouth turned into a snarl and her hands turned to claw him, rather than to embrace him.

But her eyes, somewhere in her eyes, she was still there.

"Goodbye my love," Cory said before he fired, killing their future forever.

"I used the word forever twice for good reason, Gord."

"The best thing that ever happened was you leaving the studio Liz. 'Drop dead Georgia' is on its fifth printing and has been translated into twenty languages."

"Forever, twice, last paragraph. That means--"

"Don't say it, don't say it--"

"No sequel Gordy. I have quite enough 'Young Adult' to deal with in my life as it is. I'm on the way to the station now, God only knows what she's got into this time."

"Just think about it Liz, this cash cow isn't going to last forever, might as well milk it while it can still walk."

"Even if I wanted to I couldn't. She's dead that's it."

"It's fiction, find a way. Come on, what sort of an agent would I be if I didn't try eh?"

"I can't talk about it now Gord I'm there."

Beth pulled into the Police station parking lot. The spaces for civilians were marked with signs with the words 'For Customers' emblazoned upon them. She doubted that the customer was always right here. The desk sergeant didn't look up at Beth after she inquired about her daughter and just pointed at a row of seats opposite the desk. In bad films, some of which Beth had written, these were always populated with slutty hookers or leather jacketed drug dealers. But there were was no one else there and the same misplaced sign was tacked onto the wall behind indicating that they were 'for customers'.

"Elizabeth Lamb?"

A haggard detective with clothes that didn't look like they enjoyed being worn, was calling her from a doorway. Like the desk Sergeant, he barely acknowledged her when she answered but held the door open. He was reading a stained piece of foolscap with rheumy eyes, waiting for her to join him.

"You're lucky one of our homicide boys worked as an advisor on that cop film you wrote, what was it called?" He said as they traversed a depressingly unkempt corridor.

"On the beat."

"Yeah, that's right, cop by day, rapper by night, what a pile of shit, but Barowitz earned a packet on it so I'm hoping that if I do you a solid you could put some of that my way?"

Coffee ground stained teeth smiled at her and Beth tried back, committing as many teeth as she could in the circumstances.

"The officer on the phone didn't say why you were holding my daughter."

The detective reached a door and gestured for her to enter the room.

"I pulled the high school security tapes, didn't want them ending up on the six o'clock news. Take my seat. Always better to show rather than tell. Isn't that what you writer's say?"

The wide meshed window cast a grey light over the room. Beth sat behind his desk. The name plaque was so dusty and stained that she couldn't make out the officer's name. The scarred surface was a collage of foolscap files and take away wrappers.

"Maids day off," said the detective again, brown smiling and shoving a VHS tape into a recorder wedged under a battered portable television. Its screen distorted the light from the window, curving the rectangle, a cathode half-moon. A silhouette reflected from the desk eclipsed it. It was a tarnished statue of a masked cowboy holding an oversized silver bullet. Beth assumed it was the detective's.

"Loved that show as a kid, that's a real bullet too."

She looked back to the screen. A group of cheerleaders were standing in a circle at the centre of a moonlit football pitch. The security camera footage was grainy and flickering but Beth could see that the girls were surrounding somebody. It was another girl

wearing a dirty hooded combat jacket, a ragged skirt and a pair of combat boots. It was Megan, it was her daughter. There was no sound on the tape but the cheerleaders seemed to be taunting her, fingers stabbing toward her face, silent arguments punctuated by a shove or a lunge. The hood hid any reaction to the bullying, but Beth's heart caught as she saw her daughter shake, telegraphing the first sign of tears. An involuntary maternal gasp escaped as she watched her daughter despairingly drop to her knees. Her attackers laughed harder at Megan. Time stopped just as the shamed cheerleaders began to move toward their downed prey, halted by the click of the VCR pause button.

"Your daughter was out on the field due to some Goth girl horseshit about the full moon. The particular clique she belonged to meant that you had to stand out in the moonlight at midnight and strip. From talking to the Principal, seems like the quarterback spotted her after late night practice and took a shine to her. Problem was his current girl was the head cheerleader who kinda took exception to your daughter being in her territory."

"Oh god, is she okay? What did they do to her?"

"That's not really the problem here Mrs Lamb," the detective said, his finger pressing down on the pause button. It felt like a guillotine.

The thing in the hood exploded as the soft flesh of the mocking hands reached toward her. A whirligig of arms terminated in black painted talons, scattered the girls on Megan's periphery, allowing her feral jaw to gain purchase on the arm of the head

cheerleader. She squealed, not the mock sounds of ecstasy saved for her disloyal boyfriend, but a high pitched desperate alarm.

Beth looked at Megan's eyes, strangely clear in the static hazed view. They were happy, prideful as she tasted her prey. One of the other spangled females pulled at the beast's hood and it released the object of its afflictions, dropping onto all fours before growling at its agitator. With a snarl it leapt, the black hair streaming mane-like behind her as she pounced on the unfortunate girl. Another frenzied claw attack caused the girl to collapse into a foetal ball and what little intention the others had to stay melted at the sight of their compatriots slashed visage. Megan kicked the prone girl and turned to her retreating enemies. The words were so guttural and rapid, they sounded more like barks than insults. The frequency so high that the sound emitting from Megan's mouth was an incomprehensible wail. No, not a wail Beth thought. Something else, something more familiar. The last image on the screen that Beth saw before the detective pressed the stop button was her child, staring at the moon, her head thrown back and Beth knew what the sound reminded her of. It reminded her of howling.

"There's a bit more before the security guard turns up. They called us, luckily me and Barowitz took the call. We rounded up the girls and after checking some sheets there was enough underage DUI's and adulterous Dads pulled over for speeding that we managed to talk them down. There's a couple of conditions though."

The images from the screen still played out in Beth's mind despite the tape having stopped. She could hear the Policeman's words but his voice felt distant. It was only when she realised that he had stopped and the pause lay weighty, that she answered.

"Conditions, yes, anything what are they?"

"A couple of the girls got scratched up, I said I could arrange some plastic surgery for a hundred thousand dollars. Is that something we could work out?"

The entertainment of young minds had given Beth more money than she could ever spend, certainly enough to buy Megan a second chance. She should have seen something like this coming but she was so busy with the book tour and the endless promotions that her daughter had slid quietly into the background.

"Of course."

"The other condition is that Megan is expelled, not much we can do about that one."

Beth nodded her head, there were plenty of schools that could do with a new library.

"That'll do us then, I'll take you down to holding and you can take your little Bit--"

"Don't. Please Detective, not that word," Beth said, standing up.

"Okay, okay but a piece of advice Ms Lamb, for the next few months, I'd put a curfew on that girl. Lock her up if you need to."

She tried a smile to placate the officer but she didn't agree. Her daughter wasn't an animal and Beth was going to make sure of that.

"I knew you never loved her, but this, this is sick" said Cory, holding the gun on Louis. He was moving slowly around the mortuary slab where Georgia's body lay, smiling and keeping his

hands where Cory could see them. The neon light above flickering as the battle outside continued.

"Sick? Twenty-four years of age and posing at high school for three years as a teenager that's sick," said Louis.

"Not that, you and your government friends keeping her in a secret lab, you making her look normal even though she's still dead."

"Normal?"

Louis' eyes flicked away from the gun in Cory's hand down to where Georgia lay on the slab. There was no trace of the Zombie infection, her skin was unblemished and a healthy pink.

And moving.

"She's alive," Cory said lowering the gun, now more interested in life than death. It was true, his love's chest moved slowly up and down as her lungs filled again. Georgia's eyes snapped open and both of her suitors moved to her side.

"Cory, Louis...I think, I think-"

Both of her suitors assumed Georgia's sentence would end with the words 'I'm alive'. But their assumption was incorrect.

"-there's something very wrong."

Her body suddenly twisted in every direction at once, the seizure throwing a line of foam from her mouth across her face. Cory and Louis's hands reflexively grabbed her arms, trying to hold her down, and for a moment the rivalry had gone as they united to help their love.

"Her skin, it feels like something is moving under her skin."

Louis was right, Cory could feel it too. Thick, wiry masses were pushing outwards from her soft flesh. Georgia gave out a high

pitched scream as a fine mist of blood seemed to shed from her every pour. Both men jumped back as they felt the flesh rip beneath their fingers. With no one to restrain her, the shakes caused Georgia to flip off of the slab, overturning a surgical cart before she vanished into a dark corner of the room.

Cory and Louis looked at each other, speckled with the blood of the girl they both loved. Their eyes both moved down to the slab. A large piece of shed skin was still there. A hollow hand hung like a glove over the side. Cory picked it up and looked at it. The finger flopped down without a bone to support it, the finger that Cory wanted to put a wedding ring on.

A series of dry cracks came from the darkness followed by wet, meaty, sliding sounds. Louis made the most of the distraction and grabbed the gun from his rival.

"We thought this might happen, the Zombie stage is just the lizard part of the brain activated by the virus, but if it survives long enough then it transfers to the mammal brain and a new change takes effect. I never loved her Cory, I just needed to get close to her."

"Louis I don't know what you're talking about."

Louis checked the corner but he could not see anything moving.

"I'm talking about an army of invincible soldiers that can make this country great again. I'm talking about a million Georgias, unstoppable and all doing my bidding. I'm going to weaponise your girlfriend."

A triumphant smile appeared as he mistook the look on Cory's face for defeat. But it wasn't. It was fear. Because of his rant Louis never heard the thing behind him stand up. It was only when he

felt the large furred hands around his throat that he knew it was too late.

Cory watched Georgia do terrible things to the egotistical spy and tears fell from his eyes as he watched Louis reduced to gore. Cory would have to learn to live with the fact that his girlfriend was a teenage werewolf.

Since the success of 'Georgie Grrrrrl' and the subsequent movie, (ruining the original cover of the book with 'soon to be a motion picture' in a sensationalist font and then later photos of the tepid stars involved in the film), Beth was used to the odd fan or as she called them, stalkers, hanging about outside the house. But the man who had stood on the pavement for the last few nights didn't fit the profile. He was much better dressed and much more furtive than the t-shirt obsessed who occasionally haunted the house's perimeter. They wanted to be seen, this man didn't. Worryingly, he looked more like he was waiting for something to happen. Beth carefully peered around the curtains as she was only wearing a bikini, due to the now daily ritual of sunbed top ups demanded by her agent. She could do without her semi naked body appearing on twitBook for all and sundry to comment/#perv over. Nervously twirling the phone in her fingers, Beth considered the options. Her pet policeman would come running but his favours didn't come cheap. The Police Benevolent fund should have been able to bring dead officers back to life with the amount she had 'donated'. There was something familiar about the stranger, but Beth could not quite place him. Better alive than sorry, she thought and dialled.

For a moment she thought she had rung her daughter by accident as strains of Bauhaus's 'Bela Lugosi's dead' drifted up from downstairs. Megan must have come in when Beth was on the sunbed. Her daughter didn't know she was here, and up until now she hadn't realised Megan was in the house.

"You don't have to stay out there, there's no one here, just come in you silly man...of course you're invited."

Beth watched as the middle aged man, still looking furtive, moved out of the shade of the broken streetlamp and moved to the front porch. He was wearing a Bluetooth headset and with increasing concern she realised that he was talking to Megan. The creak of the front door echoed through the house as Megan let her guest in. Grabbing the robe from the door, Beth sidled out of the mini-gym and walked to the security room. The main monitor's fly's eye stared up at her as she entered, sixteen grey-tone lenses displaying lonely rooms in the house. Lonely apart from one, where the man was led into the living room by Megan. At least Beth thought it was Megan. Her features were blurred, vibrating static on the monitor as if the light didn't like her anymore and bounced away from her face in chaotic cowardly trajectories. She was wearing a dress that Beth had never seen on her before, too tight, too leathery and way too slutty.

"You've been a good boy Professor, changing that grade to an A, you must have liked the photos I sent you." Megan said.

"I did, I know I shouldn't but I couldn't help it."

Beth recognised him now, when she went to the University for an open day before enrolling Megan. A History lecturer with a funny

name, Mr. Bramston, something like that. Megan sat on the couch, pouting and patting the seat cushion next to her.

"Don't upset yourself so, you're my favourite Professor and it's not like we're doing anything illegal. I want to do well and you want to spend time with me, that's not so terrible is it? "

Bramston looked in fascination, maybe even fear, at the place where Megan had touched the couch.

"It's not that, I could lose my job. If the Dean ever found out, God if my wife ever found out."

"They're not here, this is my house, my castle and they can't get in. God included."

Her hand stopped patting the upholstery and started to stroke it, Beth tried not to look as her daughter let her legs splay a little. An overt invitation.

"But you can."

Bramston's eye's seemed to glaze over as he moved to the couch. They kissed for a while, Megan's hand's drifted over his body as if she was sculpting him, re-shaping him, whilst the teacher's hands hung limply by his sides or hovered nervously over the exposed part of her legs.

"You're my Professor now, I own you, not the college and not your wife" Megan said, her hand caressing the thick fabric around the groin of his corduroy trousers while her tongue darted around the nape of his neck. He groaned and finally his hands relaxed succumbing to her form.

"And now because I won you, because you're my slave, I'm going to mark you as mine."

Beth stifled a gasp as her daughter stopped pecking at his neck and bit down into the taught muscles of his neck. Bramston groaned with pleasure and then seemed to deflate, as if his very life was being sucked out of him. Beth turned off the monitor, she didn't want to see anymore. She had failed. The constant moves, neglect, and multiple father figures had taken its toll on Megan's upbringing. And of course there was Georgia, the unreal girl. She had taken the part of Beth's life that should have been spent on her daughter. Megan was lost to her now, but there was one place where she could fix this, one place where this wasn't going to be the end. One place where she could make things better.

Cory was still alive, he smelled of the smoke that permeated the School of the First, it was all that was left now that they had burned it down. He had tried to face Georgia's mother alone and even with the powers his love had passed to him when she was a 'Were' he was no match for Evilabet. Georgia stood between him and the wounded Empress, defiant to the end.

"You are your father's child Georgia. But even he never made the transition from Were to Wampyr. How far you've come," Evilabet said, still proud even in defeat.

In the twilight before dawn, her mother stood in front of the ruined school that had helped Georgia fight the monsters that the empress had spawned. Evilabet was dying, the fire and Cory had done enough to ensure that. The sword that had cut down so many young in their prime was now a crutch.

"Far enough to finish your reign of terror," snarled Georgia.

Evilabet laughed.

"And in doing so you've sealed your own fate."

She was right. There were no natural caves on the island, the only shelter had been the school and that was destroyed. Georgia looked past the cliff that bordered the School and out across the sea. The sun's corona was making its way over the horizon. Its light would fall upon them soon.

"I understand how upset you were with father, how he kept secrets from you and it hurt you and it turned you into the thing you are now," Georgia said as the first rays of sunlight began to burn her.

"But there's one secret that he didn't tell you mother."

Evilabet watched her daughter burst into flames, even as she did herself. As her own long life ebbed away, despite a tinge of sadness, she knew that in death she had finally found victory. But Georgia never fell. Smiling as the fire burned brighter and brighter until it eclipsed the sun's own light, before extinguishing.

Georgia walked out of the flaming air, and she was perfect.

"You're human?" screamed Elizabet.

"That was the secret mother, we would never be monsters forever. It was just a phase, a way to survive."

"It's a trick, you're just something else now, something terrible, a new monster" said the tyrant as the flames consumed her, raging to the last.

"No, I'm just like you now" said Georgia", there are no new monsters, Mother, just mistakes we try not to make again."

The End